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## The most modern city in the world: Isamu Noguchi's cenotaph controversy and Hiroshima's city of peace

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During a 1951 press conference upon his arrival in Hiroshima, the Japanese–American artist Isamu Noguchi startled reporters with the comment “Hiroshima is probably the most modern city in the world”. Noguchi’s statement expressed the ambivalence many in Japan and beyond felt towards Hiroshima in the aftermath of the bomb. Hiroshima was an expression of a modern nightmare, a failure of the enlightenment narrative of science and progress, but Hiroshima was also a tabula rasa, an urban space open for a complete reconstruction of the city, and “[for] clearing the blinders of convention to enable a bold modernity”. Indeed, the ambivalent and conflicting meanings of the bombing continued to plague the commemoration of the bombing and rebuilding of the stricken city. This paper examines Hiroshima’s relation to nuclear modernity through a look at the controversy surrounding the rejection of Isamu Noguchi’s design for the Hiroshima cenotaph. During the debates sparked by the design and its rejection, competing visions of Hiroshima’s identity and relation to the bomb were displayed and argued about as postwar Hiroshima tried to make peace with its modern past.

**Keywords:** Hiroshima; reconstruction; Tange Kenzō; Isamu Noguchi; cenotaph controversy; peace memorial park

In 1955, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park and Museum, the first major project of Japanese architect Tange Kenzō, opened in Hiroshima. Tange, who became one of Japan’s most internationally acclaimed architects, was one of the most influential figures in Hiroshima’s commemoration history. Tange’s design, and the city plan of Hiroshima as a whole – which he supervised – aimed at offering a vision of Japanese modernity committed to peace and technological development. Indeed, Tange made his intentions for Hiroshima clear when, drawing on Le Corbusier’s famous quip, he called the Hiroshima Peace Park “a factory for peace” (Tange 1949, 42). However, Tange’s plan was not implemented smoothly. Many elements in the Peace Park plan proved to be contentious. Building a modernist building in the midst of the destruction and misery that still dominated Hiroshima was not without its critics. American censorship and the popularity of the “peace” narrative in the first 10 years after the bombing did much to muffle such conflicts.<sup>1</sup> But the ambivalent and conflicting meanings of the bombing continued to plague the commemoration of the tragedy and the rebuilding of the stricken city. This paper examines Hiroshima’s reconstruction project through looking at a major controversy that uncovered much of these conflicts and contradictions surrounding the Peace Park: the rejection of artist Isamu Noguchi’s design for the Hiroshima cenotaph. Although

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Tange supported it, Isamu Noguchi's design for the cenotaph was rejected, at least partially because of Noguchi's American ancestry. During the debates about the rejection, competing visions of Hiroshima's identity and relation to the bomb were displayed and argued about as postwar Hiroshima tried to make peace with its modern past and itself.

Although discussions of Hiroshima's commemoration usually focus on its place as the centre of a burgeoning peace movement, an understudied side of commemoration and the city's rebuilding was an emphasis on the remaking of the city as a model modern city.<sup>2</sup> Hiroshima's reconstruction was seen as a symbol of Japan's transformation and re-embrace of Western modernity. Indeed, ironically, it was precisely because Hiroshima was the site of modernity's worst nightmare that it could be rebuilt as an expression of utopian modernism, as if to pose to the world the choice between "utopia or Hiroshima".<sup>3</sup> The cenotaph episode illustrates the many contradictions and ambivalences within Hiroshima's, and indeed Japan's, postwar embrace of the modern project. As historian Oguma Eiji noted, the first postwar decade saw the re-embrace of enlightenment values and Westernization by Japanese elites (Oguma 2007). Turning their backs to Asia, many in Japan now looked, yet again, to America and the West for inspiration. Hiroshima's transformation from a military city into a city of peace, with all its attendant progressive interpretations and emphasis on reconciliation with those who destroyed it, was very much in line with that development. Significantly, the vision of the future Hiroshima offered was a transnational one wherein the significance of the city's Japanese character, or any issue of "racial" identity, was supposedly overcome. The disaster of war and atomic warfare were actually refashioned as an opportunity to remake Hiroshima (and Japan) as a shiny new city of peace and capitalist prosperity – a phoenix rising from the ashes of war – thus leaving its destroyed old landscapes, the old militarist values, and the racial hierarchies behind. Noguchi's intervention briefly uncovered this façade and demonstrated the complexities and continuities within the "peace city's" modern history.

### The city of peace

During a 1951 press conference held upon his arrival in Hiroshima, the Japanese-American artist Isamu Noguchi startled Japanese reporters with the comment, "Hiroshima is probably the most modern city in the world" (Funatō October 1951, 123). Noguchi's statement expressed the ambivalence many in Japan and beyond felt towards Hiroshima in the aftermath of the bomb. Hiroshima was an expression of a modern nightmare, a failure of the enlightenment narrative of science and progress, but Hiroshima was also a tabula rasa, an urban space open for a complete reconstruction of the city, and "[for] clearing the blinders of convention to enable a bold modernity" (Winther 1994, 23). With only a few exceptions, Hiroshima, and Japan as a whole, embraced the second interpretation of Noguchi's declaration in its reconstruction of a new postwar identity. The destruction of the war was perceived as a new beginning, and the defeat as an opportunity for transformation. Hiroshima's destruction was seen as a chance to move away from the (errant) militarist modernity of the war era into a bright (Americanized) modern future. By the late 1940s the equation of Hiroshima's and of Japan's postwar "mission" with a quest for peace, and, furthermore, the equation of the pursuit of peace with the pursuit of capitalist modernity, was fast becoming a dominant official interpretation of the bombing..<sup>4</sup>

This narrative created in Hiroshima credited the bomb, as Americans often did, with bringing peace and ending World War II. In Hiroshima's account, however, it was Hiroshima's sacrifice rather than the bomb itself that brought peace. With this "baptism

of fire” (another often-repeated phrase), Hiroshima was transformed into a transnational city of peace with a special mission to warn the world of the dangers of nuclear war. Japan’s celebrated peace constitution and the discourse of peace made the Japanese adherents of what Carol Gluck called “a cult of new beginnings”, which helped them forget what had preceded the end of the war (quoted in Saito 2006, 363). Curiously, this discourse was both distinctively Japanese, continuing the prewar trope of Japanese uniqueness, and universal at the same time: erasing any particular ethnic identity of other non-Japanese victims.

As John Dower (1996, 123) has argued, the bomb was Janus-faced; it was both a reminder of the folly of war and, also, a symbol of the new omnipotence of science. This certainly fit into the optimistic message of renewal and the emphasis on peace promoted by the Americans. The phrase “Building a nation of science and culture” (*kagaku to bunka no kokka o kensetsu*) was ubiquitous all over the Japanese media. The word *heiwa* and the prefix *shin* (new) suddenly appeared everywhere (Dower 1999, 173). The discourse on transformation and modernization was nothing new for the Japanese. From Meiji onward, the Japanese were taught by their modernizing elites to accept change and transformation and to discard much of their old way of life. Building on this history, from the end of the war onwards, American and Japanese elites actively tried to direct Japan’s gaze towards the future. In Hiroshima itself, just devastated from the latest advance of science, the very first mention of plans for commemoration in September 1945 was a call by Hiroshima’s governor for “building a new Hiroshima and a scientific Japan”. Significantly, the governor also went on to say, a day later, that he wanted to push Hiroshima as “a major inner sea tourist point and for getting funds and resources from the world to create a peace memorial city” (quoted in *Chūgoku Shinbun*, 21 September 1945).

After the Americans’ arrival, as Hiroshima was preparing for reconstruction, it asked for and got help from the occupation authorities. In mid-May 1946, at Hiroshima City’s request, Lt. John D. Montgomery from the US Army and Major Harvey Stein from the Australian forces were stationed as official reconstruction advisers in Hiroshima. They were quick to show Hiroshima the “proper” way forward. In a June 1946 interview, Montgomery called on residents to “make Hiroshima a symbol of international peace”. Montgomery went on to say: “the memorial tower [a tower Hiroshima erected at ground zero] is for me, not for commemoration...but should stand for the baptism of the first dropping of the A-bomb, ending of WWII and creation of eternal peace” (Ishimaru 2009, 833; *Chūgoku Shinbun*, 6 June 1946). Montgomery was also the first one to propose building a museum on ground zero (*bakushinchi*) and the infrastructure for visitors to the site (Ishimaru 2009, 831). Miles W. Vaughn, an influential Japan-based American journalist, made similar calls a few months later. In 1946 and again in 1947, Vaughn called on Hiroshima residents, in a letter that was published in the press, to build a “peace memorial city”, and a “memorial museum where artifacts and pictures will be shown for the visitors”. Both Vaughn and Montgomery promised they would appeal for reconstruction funds in the US (*Chūgoku Shinbun*, 2 August 1946, 7 July 1947). Montgomery in particular mentioned the Rotary Club and religious organizations, and promised, “Hiroshima can count on the world’s sympathy” (*Chūgoku Shinbun*, 22 May 1946).

In 1947, Hiroshima did look to the world for help. Hiroshima lost almost 80% of its tax base due to the bomb and the disbanding of the military, on which many of its industries were based (Hiroshima-shi 1981, 29–41). Frustrated by its failure to receive reconstruction funds from the government, Hiroshima City turned to fundraising as a possible source of revenue. In these efforts, Hiroshima’s city fathers crafted a Universalist message of peace that bordered on the Orwellian in its zeal to erase the perpetrator, the

US, from the picture, while accepting the American interpretation of the bomb as the cause for peace. In a letter to donors, Itō Yutaka, the chairman of Hiroshima's newly created reconstruction committee, wrote:

Hiroshima has been accorded a historical significance and is known throughout the world as the center of the dropping of the atomic bomb, one of the main causes contributing to the termination of the Second World War, we consider it a duty given to us by Providence to reconstruct Hiroshima...as a city of peace and culture. (Itō to Donors, 1948)

Reflecting Hiroshima's adherence to the American imposed narrative, Itō further thanked the US for its gift of democracy. "We want", Itō wrote to the American people, "to express our profound respect for your efforts for the peace and liberty of mankind and would like to offer our sincerest gratitude...[to those] who helped Hiroshima". Going even further along these lines, Mayor Hamai Shinzō, in a more targeted letter to the president of Carroll College in Wisconsin, pronounced, "On August 6th 1945 our city of Hiroshima was *born anew*" (Hamai Shinzō et al. to President of Carroll College, 1948, emphasis added). The intended audience, of course, explains much of this rhetoric, but in Japanese publications as well one can find similar sentiment. One newspaper account, for instance, called the bomb in 1946 "the bright flash of peace" (Zwigenberg 2014, 28). Another factor one must remember is American censorship, which prevented any kind of open discussion about the bomb in Hiroshima.

As fundraising efforts continued, the city solicited help from architects, city planners, the occupation army (Lt. Montgomery was a guest of honour), and local residents to help its reconstruction committee envision the new city. The committee, which first met in February 1946, included representatives from the city, prefecture, and leading business interests, as well as journalists and academics. It reviewed mostly proposals and plans by professional city planners and experts, but also accepted suggestions from ordinary citizens. Hiroshima's reconstruction plans were more about reinventing Hiroshima as a modern city than about commemoration and loss. Ishikawa Hideaki, one of Japan's leading architects, took this sentiment to extremes. When he was invited by Hiroshima to the reconstruction committee, Ishikawa told its members, "Hiroshima has a resource which cannot be easily obtained even in hundreds of years and which must be utilized for the future, and it is vast open land" (quoted in Hiroshima-shi 1981, 318). Mayor Hamai and others shared this vision: "the disappearance of the old city gave us a chance of creating a fine new one if we do not let it slip through our fingers" (Hamai [1967] 2010, 59). To be fair to Hamai, at times he also had reservations about the extreme measures that reconstruction required, such as the forced removal of residents on Nakajima. But, Hamai argued, "Hiroshima's pre-war visage had to be transformed. Rather than vainly clinging to the old downtown structure...we should plan for redevelopment" (Hamai 2010, 65). The redevelopment plan was based on a number of suggestions made by architects and others. The majority of these adhered to zoning and other ideas about separation of industry and residence, grid road networks, etc. that were espoused then by modernist town planning. Many of the plans, significantly, brought American cities in as a model for Hiroshima (Ishimaru 1984, 15). Planners often conflated "peace" and "prosperity". Watanabe Shigeru's influential plan was typical. Watanabe spoke of creating a modern city of tourism and commerce, and in its centre, "monuments for world peace". We must, he concluded, "build Hiroshima on [the] basis of friendship with America" (quoted in Ishimaru 1984, 17).

Parallel to the planning efforts, Hiroshima again tried (and now succeeded) to achieve funds for reconstruction through its campaign to get the Diet to enact a Hiroshima Peace Memorial Law. This successful effort became the legal basis for its reconstruction plan. The 1949 Peace City Memorial Law marks the high-water mark of the campaign to transform Hiroshima from a place of apocalyptic destruction into a place of hope and “bright peace”. Hiroshima, which could not initially muster enough support from the Diet and faced stiff resistance from Nagasaki representatives and others, finally managed to get it to pass after the American authorities made it clear they favoured the law. The success of this law could be attributed to the peculiar alignment of interests between American and Japanese elites. Both sides had a need to put the past behind them and to cooperate as allies in the new Cold War. As the law was drafted, the Chinese Civil War was drawing to a close and Japan’s old foe was now taking on the role of America’s new “Yellow peril”. The Hiroshima law was a way to give both sides what they wanted and to turn Hiroshima’s gaze to the future. Teramitsu Tadashi, the Hiroshima Diet member who drafted the law, struggled with the wording in order to get American approval. Two competing meanings of Hiroshima’s bombing emerged from the various drafts of the law: one that represented Hiroshima as a Japanese city, and another that saw it as an international peace city. The final version did not mention Japan but aimed

to construct the city of Hiroshima as the Eternal Peace Commemorating City, the symbol of human ideal for eternal peace, as well as the symbol for renunciation of war, is to answer the world hope for the reconstruction of HIROSHIMA. ... (Hiroshima Shi 1949, upper case in original)

The law passed the Diet 11 May 1949, and went into effect, after approval by Hiroshima residents in a special referendum, on 6 August 1949. With the passing of the law, Hiroshima finally got the funds it needed to rebuild itself as a modern city. The law and its wording served as a guideline for future official commemoration. Even after the occupation was over, Hiroshima stuck with the wording and spirit of the law. The law was an expression of and a further impetus to the hegemonic role of the peace narrative. It was very much responsible for what Carol Gluck (1990, 12–3) later called the telling of “history in the passive voice” in Hiroshima, with Japan playing the role of the victim, and the context of both its own war crimes on the continent and the horrors inflicted on it by the Americans conveniently ignored. Indeed, as funds were made available and larger commemoration projects were becoming possible, this whole narrative was becoming part of the shape of the city itself, as architects and city planners sought to remake Hiroshima as a city of peace.

### **The cenotaph controversy**

The 1949 law gave Hiroshima the funds to carry out what was already a very ambitious city plan. Consistent with the way Hiroshima represented itself elsewhere, the city design equated the creation of a “peace city” with achieving modern, rational city planning and capitalist prosperity. In the heart of the city, Tange Kenzō designed a forward-looking memorial that recounted to visitors a story of resurrection and promise: leading one from the destroyed A-bomb dome into the modern building of the museum. The Peace Park was to be the “moral core of Hiroshima’s city plan” (Tange [1954] 1966, 45).<sup>5</sup> Tange’s plan had defined the physical space of the Peace Park and the city and had huge implications for future

commemoration. It literally set in stone Hiroshima's message, which was intended to overcome both the destruction of the bomb and the prewar (modern) past. Tange, who formerly designed commemorative project for Japan's wartime militarist regime (and openly supported it), now aimed at building a memorial representative of "Hiroshima's noble quest for peace". This was, for Tange, more than just a memorial. "Peace", he wrote, "is not just politics but a pure spiritual movement of striving for peace... [which is] the new intellectual trend of the atomic era" (Tange [1956] 1966, 44).

Hiroshima's spiritual mission, however, was to be pursued in a peculiarly modern way. Following the war, Tange, like many of his modernist architecture colleagues, quickly embraced modernization and democracy. In his essay accompanying the design, Tange wrote he was engaged in "making Hiroshima into a factory for peace" (Tange 1949, 42). The choice of the imagery of a "factory" was significant, as the factory was the ideal metaphor for internationalism. Le Corbusier ([1924] 1946, 95), who Tange admired, used the language of a "machine for living" for his designs, and now, Tange presented his design as a machine for peace.<sup>6</sup> Still, the memorial was not to be just a factory for peace; it also, Tange argued, should not ignore people's day-to-day needs. Tange designed the park to accommodate these, serving as a community centre and a library as well as an archive and a commemoration centre.

Tange's rhetoric is reflected in his design. The Western and modernist design signifies a bold new beginning. Tange arranged the memorial on an axis perpendicular to the 100-m roads he designed for the city. The axis connects in one line the Atomic bomb dome, an arch (later to be the cenotaph, which was supposed to be designed by Noguchi), and a square able to hold 20,000 people (later to grow to a larger one for 50,000) that led to the memorial hall. Tange designed three modernist buildings in bare concrete. These stood on pillars that enclosed the square. One could see a straight running line from the dome to the memorial hall; a long pool with roads and trees on both sides leading from the bridges (across the two river that enclosed the Park) to the island and on to the arch facilitated the axis. The Atomic Bomb Dome preserved across the river represented the suffering of the war, while the gardens represented a healing of the land. While the three main buildings (the museum, library, and assembly halls) were built in a bold monumental style, the pillars evoke Japanese rice granaries. Another reference to Japanese forms is the *haniwa*-shaped arch.

The *haniwa* arch, however, was a later addition. Initially, Tange sought the help of Isamu Noguchi in designing the cenotaph. Noguchi's design inserted elements of doubt, mourning and ambiguity into Tange's modernist design – elements Tange actually welcomed. The design, however, ran contrary to Hiroshima's story of rebirth and (supposedly clean) break with its past, and was eventually rejected. Noguchi had enormous enthusiasm for Japanese art and culture. For Noguchi, Japan had very little material wealth but, through its culture, had an appreciation of the limitations and nothingness (*mu*) in the heart of modern material culture – an appreciation "we in America are just starting to learn". Furthermore, Noguchi was received in Japan with much enthusiasm. "Nowhere have I experienced", wrote Noguchi, "more goodwill and openness than in Japan in 1950...war has leveled the barriers and hope was everyone's property" (Noguchi" 1950, 24). Noguchi had tremendous hopes for Japan. He wanted to be part of the new experiments and new beginnings he saw around him. He told a reporter he wanted to "prime the pump of their renaissance" ("Isamu Noguchi" 1950, 24). He truly felt that he was witnessing the rebirth of Japan. Hiroshima, however, had a very sobering effect on Noguchi.

Isamu Noguchi first met Tange in 1950. Even before the 1950 visit, the atomic bomb enormously troubled Noguchi, already an established avant-garde artist at the time. Before coming to Japan he wrote he was terribly “depressed by the ever present menace of Atomic annihilation” (Noguchi 1967, 31). Unlike in Japan, where US censorship kept information on the bomb under tight control, many Americans, Noguchi included, were very well informed as to the suffering and the terrible destruction wrought by the bomb. The Soviet Union’s development of nuclear weapons and the onset of the cold war made the slogan “no more Hiroshimas” terribly relevant and troubling for many Americans. Noguchi wrote at the time that he was “drawn to Hiroshima by [a] sense of guilt” (Noguchi 1967, 85).

Tange first met Noguchi in Tokyo. He showed Noguchi a model of the Peace Park, then under construction in Hiroshima, and he told Fujimoto Chimata, a Hiroshima city official with whom he had a long correspondence, “We immediately hit it off” (Tange to Fujimoto, 27 May 1950). The Peace Memorial plan was then encountering many financial and other difficulties. While some in the Finance Ministry and in Hiroshima wanted to scale back the plan, Tange was adamant that the design be implemented “as such”. In a letter to Mayor Hamai, he blamed the “mixed message” and “lack of unity in Hiroshima” for impeding the implementation of the “noble idea of the peace city” (Tange to Hamami, 30 March 1950). Adding Noguchi on board would have given the plan a much-needed boost as Noguchi and his star wife, Yamaguchi Yoshiko (a fascinating figure in her own right), were celebrities in Japan. They were also magnets for controversy and gossip. In one instance, a *Tokyo Shinbun* correspondent accused him of being arrogant towards Japanese artists. Tange was incensed, assuring Fujimoto, that “whatever was published about Noguchi in the [newspaper] *Tokyo Shinbun*...was a complete lie” (Tange to Fujimoto, 3 August 1950). Noguchi proposed to design a Peace Tower, but at that early moment Tange worried that it might not “be suitable for Japan at the present time”. Tange wondered, furthermore, if perhaps Noguchi’s fame and attendant “troubles” (*turaberu*) might prove problematic to the Hiroshima project, but thought it is a “good idea over all” (Tange to Fujimoto, 3 August 1950). Tange tried to arrange a meeting with Hamai and Noguchi to finalize the details of the design, but Noguchi returned to the US before it could be arranged.

The start of the Korean War brought much urgency to the project. Tange, as well as many in Hiroshima, now saw the peace city project as directly threatened by the war next door. The exact nature of the threat, however, was a matter for debate. Many in the peace movement frantically tried to organize to prevent the spread of the war. Students and workers marched under slogans such as “Resist Nuclear Weapons! Do not let the 300,000 die in vain (*genbaku Hantai! 300 man nin no shi o muda in suru na*).<sup>7</sup> Even the City joined in the fray and raised its voice against the danger of American use of atomic weapons. In a rare departure from the usual peace narrative, Mayor Hamai warned during a visit to Switzerland of the imminent threat of the use of American nuclear bombs (Hiroshima-ken 1976, 199). The new anti-bomb discourse had, especially on the far left, aspects of anti-Americanism and Asian solidarity reminiscent of wartime ideas of Asian racial solidarity against Euro-American colonialism. As Mathew Jones (2010, 99) noted, the war brought back race as a factor in Asian attitudes towards the US. The massive American bombing of civilians in Korea raised anew a perception that the US bombing of Hiroshima had a “racial dimension” (Jones 2010, 2). As Oguma Eiji (2007) demonstrated, these years saw a shift, among intellectuals, from a western-centred view of modernity to an anti-American and pro-Asian stance. The Chinese revolution was idealized and many felt a new solidarity with

Asians. After the war broke out, Shimizu Ikutaro, one of Japan's most popular intellectuals, commented that, "now, once again, the Japanese are Asians" (Oguma 2007).

Some, however, saw Asian issues differently. In August 1950, Hiroshima's newly founded Public Safety Committee banned the 6 August ceremony on Occupation authorities' orders. "This day [6 August]", went the committee's declaration, "should be a day for silent prayer and not, as the peace movement tries to make it, as a cover for anti-occupation activities". The committee further called on residents "not to participate in these anti-Japanese criminal activities", referring to the "Korean League" as one of the "anti-Japanese" groups (Hiroshima Shi, 1949). That kind of thinking was reminiscent of prewar targeting of Korean-Japanese and leftists, such as in the infamous massacres following the Kanto Earthquake. All that tension caused much unease in Hiroshima. Tange wrote to Hamai at the time, showing "great concern and anxiety" over what was still called the Korean incident's (*Chōsen jihen*) impact on the cause (of peace) and congratulating Hamai for showing great perseverance and responsibility in these hard times (Tange to Hamai, 14 September 1950).

The war, however, was turning out to be not so bad for Hiroshima. As the war dragged on, many in Hiroshima saw a whole new side to the Korean War as it brought prosperity to the city. The city's former munitions and heavy industry revived and was now supplying the Americans with Howitzers, Jeeps, uniforms, and many other services. This turn of events was aptly symbolized by the theft in March 1951 of the Peace Bell from the Peace Tower – ostensibly, claimed the police, because of the metal shortage due to demand by military contractors (*Chūgoku Shinbun*, 27 March 1951). This wartime boom also eased the financial pressure on the memorial project. The money to build the third building of Tange's design, which the government had withheld, was given by private donations (Kestenbaum 1996, 309). In September 1951, following a visit the preceding June by Noguchi and Tange to city hall, funding was also pledged by the city for two memorial bridges and a cenotaph to be designed by Noguchi (*Chūgoku Shinbun*, 11 June 1951). On the occasion of the formal commission, Noguchi sent an open letter to Hiroshima residents conveying his wishes that the bridges would symbolize Hiroshima's rebirth (*Chūgoku Shinbun*, 28 September 1951). He later told the press that designing the cenotaph was the "greatest honor for me as an artist" (*Asahi Shinbun*, 8 April 1952).

Also that June, residents who lived on the future location of the peace park petitioned the city against their eviction (*Chūgoku Shinbun*, 24 June 1951). This contradiction between the lofty sentiment of the building design and the situation on the ground became readily apparent to the artists when they visited the building site in November 1951 (the occasion of the "modern city" comment). Six years after the bombing, much of central Hiroshima still stood in ruins. Visiting the site of the memorial greatly shook Noguchi. He likened Hiroshima, echoing contemporary discourse, to a "modern Pompeii" (Funatō October 1951, 124). It was not only the physical destruction but also the despair he saw in Nakajima that shocked Noguchi: the scattered graves there were still on the site, and, even more so, the shantytown that sprang up on the island. Upon seeing this reality, his first words to Tange were "In here?" He reproached Tange for the city's intention to evict the residents of Nakajima for the purpose of constructing the memorial. "[Your] modern city plan is impressive. ... [And] idealism should be respected but what about the [people's] sacrifice"? (125). Unfortunately, the reporter did not record Tange's response. Noguchi was so shaken that he refused to join Tange and other scholars for a seminar about Tange's city plan in Hiroshima, asking for it to be held outside of the city. In Hiroshima itself "I can not hold any discussion about a utopian plan for Hiroshima"

(Funatō October 1951, 126; *Chūgoku Shinbun*, 5 November 1951). Still, Noguchi agreed to go ahead with his design.

Noguchi then returned to Tokyo, where he continued to work on a design for the cenotaph. The design reflected Noguchi's ambivalent position in regards to Tange's project and the modernist promise it embodied. Noguchi's design for the cenotaph, not unlike Tange's own plan, mixed Western and Japanese motifs in its design. Noguchi's design, however, implied a much more tortured modernity than Tange's vision. The design featured a combination of an underground vault-like chamber to commemorate the dead, which Noguchi likened to "the womb of the earth from which we come and into which we return", and a parabolic arch with thick legs sunk deep into the earth (Winther 1994, 26). The arch design suggests that it grows outwards from the vault. One would climb down through a thin, fragile-looking staircase into the vault, which was to be used as the repository for the names of those who perished in the blast. The vault had in it a sculpture done in an abstract form, but which evoked the pre-modern *haniwa* figures (ancient Japanese burial figures) titled "Mother goddesses", representing what Noguchi saw as "an allegory of both hope and mourning" (Winther 1994, 26). The whole design had a sombre air to it, yet, like the city of Hiroshima itself, it aimed at the possibility of rebirth. The alignment of the axis with the Dome enhanced the emphasis on atomic destruction, yet when one was to emerge from the underground chamber into the light through the massive legs of the arch it was as if she were emerging from a womb. While hope for a new Hiroshima and a new modernity was shared by both designs, Noguchi was much more ambivalent towards Hiroshima's newfound modernity.

Tange was very enthusiastic about Noguchi's design. "It was a small model but it overflowed with a generosity of spirit", he wrote; "it had the placidity of an ancient jewel. I could sense it was something wonderful" (Tange 1956, 126). Tange was drawn to Noguchi's use of ancient Japanese motifs that he, as well, tried to incorporate into his work. Suddenly, however, in April 1952, Noguchi unexpectedly received a letter informing him of his rejection. Both Tange and Noguchi speculated that the reason for the rejection was because he was American (Duus 2004, 254). Mayor Hamai claimed later the design was too abstract for Hiroshima's purposes (*Chūgoku Shinbun*, 10 June 1965). The matter might have been resolved discreetly (Noguchi's commission of the bridges remained in force) if not for the stardom of Yamaguchi Yoshiko. Yamaguchi's public support of her husband, Noguchi, especially after a greatly publicized visit to Hiroshima just two days after the rejection announcement, quickly turned the affair into a scandal (*Chūgoku Shinbun*, 18 April 1952).

The reasons for the rejection are not clear. One explanation is that Noguchi and Tange went behind the back of the committee chairman, Tange's former teacher Kishida Hideto, straight to Hamai, thus angering Kishida and leading to the rejection. Tange was Kishida's junior and studied under him in Tokyo. According to Jacqueline Kestenbaum, the relationship with Kishida played at least some role in Tange winning the Hiroshima and earlier projects. It is more than reasonable to suggest that Kishida was simply unhappy with Tange bypassing him and going straight to the mayor. Fujimoto Chimata, Tange's contact in Hiroshima, recalled that the prevailing opinion among city hall staff was that "the biggest reason behind the problem with Noguchi's design was that he did not go through Kishida, the big boss" (Duus 2004, 256).<sup>8</sup> There was more to the rejection than just insider politics. Noguchi's rejection was widely debated in the papers and on the floor of Hiroshima city's assembly. One assembly member asked the mayor whether the rejection was because Noguchi was a foreigner. Hamai replied that the committee felt that Tange should "take responsibility for the whole design" and that the decision was based solely

on architectural considerations. The committee, Hamai emphasized, “did not take into consideration anything like the fact that the designer was a foreigner” (quoted in Duus 2004, 254). Most contemporaries, however, were not convinced. Tange wrote that the decision reflected public opinion and a “growing consensus that the memorial should be designed by a Japanese” (Tange 1956, 130). Committee members were quoted as saying “someone from the country that dropped the bomb [could not] possibly design the cenotaph” (Chūgoku Shinbun 1995, 38). Race and Noguchi’s mixed parenthood were a major theme in the debate.<sup>9</sup> An anonymous piece in one national newspaper claimed:

In Isamu Noguchi’s blood there is mixed half which is from overseas. . . . Coming to occupied Japan where Nisei [second-generation Japanese Americans] have clout, he spread the idea in the press that he, of all people, was the most suitable person to make the monument for the slogan ‘No More Hiroshima’ – thus showing the mixed character of his temperament. (quoted in Winther 1994, 27)

Other authors defended Noguchi’s right to design the cenotaph. A Hiroshima author wrote, “to shun a work of art because the artist is a foreigner is to fail to see the international character of art” (27). Okamoto Tarō, who would become one of Japan’s leading artists, wrote, “Hiroshima is already an international place. . . the fact that the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima is a product of the lack of Japanese awareness of the world” (27).

The controversy unmasked the contradictions and ambiguities in the Hiroshima project. Continuities in wartime thinking, resurgent feelings of Japanese uniqueness, racial thinking, and resentment of the Americans persisted. Following the controversy, Kawazoe Noboru wrote a fierce critique of Tange in a devastating critique of Hiroshima’s narrative, pointing out that “the people of Hiroshima all speak in unison about that cruel day. . . but we know that this act ended a war of atrocities (committed by our army)” (Kawazoe 1976, vol. 1, 215). Indeed, the bomb, for Kawazoe, in stark contrast to Tange and other Hiroshima figures, was a cause for reflection over the whole edifice of Japanese modernization and enlightenment. The bomb, he wrote, “has caused many to reflect deeply of the meaning of civilization (*bunmei*). The [bomb] points to a lingering doubt, did we achieve happiness through the attainment of civilization [or just the destruction of the A-bomb]” (316). As Winther (1994) pointed out, however, the Japanese played a special role in what was a global moment of doubt. Echoing a widely held sentiment in Japan, Kawazoe wrote, “We Japanese who experienced this destruction on our bodies, have a particularly strong feeling [of doubt]” (Kawazoe 1976, 221). Kawazoe then proceeded, however, to blame the West and westernization for Japan’s woes. Western civilization produced the technology of nuclear war, Kawazoe argued, in a similar way to the imperialism that colonized Asia and forced Japan to adopt a similar imperialist stance, which led in turn to the Japanese atrocities in Asia. Ironically, though, with the nuclear bomb, Western science’s “highest achievement[.] . . Japan was knocked out of the line of Western powers and it was only then that Japanese people were pressed back to a self-realization of their real Asian identity” (quoted in Winther 1994, 26; see also Kawazoe 1976, 221).

Thus Kawazoe, like many in the peace movement, recaptured Japanese uniqueness, but he did so via a return to Asia. Asian solidarity was, as mentioned earlier, quite popular in Japan’s progressive circles at the time. This was the time of decolonization and many Japanese were excited about the ideas about Asian solidarity and independence that were coming out of what would soon become the non-aligned movement. When India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal

Nehru visited Hiroshima in 1957, he received a hero's welcome as a "peace maker". Over 30,000 people lined the streets and Nehru was showered with gifts and honours by the city and the peace movement (*Chūgoku Shinbun*, 9 October 1957). These pan-Asian ideas were, again, dangerously close to wartime talk of anti-colonialism and Asian co-prosperity used by Japan's militarists against the West, and it is no small irony that Kawazoe, one of a small number of critics who raised these points, attributed these to Western influence.<sup>10</sup> The Noguchi controversy was an occasion for debating such sentiments and interpretations of the bombing in a way that had not been possible earlier. These debates also suggest the importance of racial thinking in the rejection of the design. Race, which was supposedly subsumed under the transnational modernity of the Peace Park – obscuring the racial hatreds that played a role in both Japanese aggression and US nuclear warfare – resurfaced as a central factor in the Hiroshima debate. The rejection of Noguchi's design had the effect of making Tange's plan much more unitary by erasing the ambiguities and depth Noguchi's cenotaph could have given it. The city's narrative of rebirth and smooth postwar progress away from its past was reaffirmed. Indeed, without Noguchi's cenotaph, Hiroshima was a very different place.

## Conclusion

In her work on Hiroshima, Lisa Yoneyama (1999) observed that there are three different kinds of "modernities" hiding underneath the seemingly unitary façade of the Peace Park. First, there is the Meiji-era building of the A-bomb dome. Designed by the Czech architect Jan Letzel, the 1915 continental-secession style "Industrial Promotion Hall" was a material representation of Japan's hopeful and confident imperial modernity, and the promise of science and industry. The Peace Park itself, a reworking of Tange Kenzō's monumental design for a "Greater East Asia War" memorial, represented a second (unrecognized) modernity. This was the modernity of Japanese fascism, which aimed at overcoming Meiji's modernity's ills and recovering a putative Japanese past (Inoue 1987, 262). The third expression of modernity was, of course, that of the bomb. Destroyed by the bomb, the A-bomb dome could be seen as a symbol of the failure of both modernities and stands as a testimony to the coming of a third, much gloomier, yet not in the least a less modern age (Yoneyama 1999, 2–5).

One might add a fourth type of modernity to Yoneyama's list. The Peace Park itself was an embodiment of the 1940s and 1950s' "return" of a belief in science, democracy, and progress, embodied in Tange's hopes for creating a "moral core" for Hiroshima and the modernist design of the Peace Museum. His plan, however, sought to promote an internationalist vision that aimed at erasing racial tensions and, with it, the painful history and present reoccurrence of these. What all these interpretations of Hiroshima and Japan's larger modern experience shared was a very selective use of the past. What the Noguchi controversy did was to bring to bear the multiple modern pasts of Hiroshima, and interfere with and complicate the unitary façade of the latest incarnation Hiroshima City has adopted. This history of modernities was not a linear progress; it developed with many twists and turns as well as with complex and ambivalent characters and events. Tange, for instance, could be a proponent of all modern visions and, at the same time, champion Isamu Noguchi's darker "intervention" in his otherwise forward-looking design. Noguchi himself was enthusiastic about Japan's "rebirth" yet painfully aware of the continuities in racial thinking shared by both his homelands, Japan and the US. Indeed, the continuities and contradictions of Japan's modern project are rife in Hiroshima. The "most modern city in the world" is an apt term for Hiroshima. The city itself, as a physical site and as a symbol, embedded many of the paradoxes and ambiguities of Japan's continuing

interaction and struggles with its past, and the different modernities that intersected with and were reflected in its built environment.

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### Notes

1. Japan's embrace of pacifism was not a simple imposition of the conquering American forces, but was popular with most of the political spectrum. Even the newly legalized Japanese Communist Party (JCP) saw the Americans as liberators in the first couple of years of the occupation. Thus, open debate about the nature of Japan's new polity or, in Hiroshima's case, the nature of reconstruction was constricted by the imposition of both external censorship and the newly popular paradigms of peaceful (Americanized) development.
2. A major exception is Lisa Yoneyama's (1999) work on Hiroshima. Yoneyama, however, is not a historian and did not examine the historical development of the city. There is a substantial body of work in Japanese, mostly by local historians, on the development of Hiroshima as a peace city. See for instance Ubuki Satoru (1992), who is the preeminent Japanese historian of the city. Ishimaru Norieki also wrote many articles on the topic. For English, see Ran Zwigenberg (2014).
3. The original phrase, coined by Hans Kundani (2009) in regards to the German student movement in the 1960s was "Utopia or Auschwitz". My own research led me to see Hiroshima as a site as pertinent for Germany, Japan, and beyond.
4. Because of space limitations, Nagasaki's (in many respects unique) development is not examined here.
5. As Inoue Shōichi pointed out, the Peace Park design displays many parallels to Tange's early design, which was once hailed as "the vision best representing the sublime objective of establishing the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity sphere" (quoted in Yoneyama 1999, 3). In an essay accompanying his design, Tange condemned Western Monumental architecture and "Anglo-American craving for world domination". This style of architecture, according to Tange, "oppress [es] men and ha[s] no connection to us... the very fact that we do not have this 'monumentality' is the triumph of the holy country of Japan" (quoted in Kestenbaum 1996, 108).
6. Le Corbusier's original quote was "a house is a machine for living". Tange had a long relationship with Le Corbusier and his group. He presented his Hiroshima plan to the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), and his postwar plans show a considerable influence from the group (Le Corbusier and Etchells ([1924], 1946, 95)).
7. The phrase is from a Hiroshima student union demonstration on 27 June 1950 (quoted in Hiroshima-ken 1976, 197).
8. Noguchi himself suspected as much. In a 1956 interview he remarked (without mentioning Kishida by name), "in Japan there is an especially deep-rooted problem of boss favoritism... some influential person controls the group and [his] rather than the opinions of the whole committee controls decisions on public issues" (see Noguchi 1952, 39).
9. Art historian Bert Winther-Tamaki explored a whole range of responses to the rejection. Much of my information on this debate comes from his excellent article on the topic (Winther 1994).
10. A *Chūgoku Shinbun* editorial welcoming Nehru noted, "Japan and India share a long Asian history. And that cooperation would lead to bright development" (9 October 1957). These words could have easily been taken from a Japanese wartime propaganda pamphlet. On Japanese anti-colonial propaganda, see Dower (1986).

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