

The Second Hiroshima Peace Studies Tour (2008)

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The 2008 Peace Studies Tour from March 1st to March 8th has ended. Let's look back at this last trip and compare it to the first trip in 2006.

The reason for the report being late

Although the results from the first trip were presented at the Asian academic conference held on September 9th, 2006, this year the meeting was held on October 11th. However, the data from the 2008 trip had not yet been fully analyzed. The reason for the delay was inconsistencies in the questionnaire results. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis was required.

Questionnaire investigation

This time, research questionnaires were conducted before and after the trip, enabling the change in the students' thoughts to be numerically recorded.

Participants

Last time, of the 20 participants, half of the group was made up of honors students. This time, there were 11 non-honors students, and 3 general participants (College professors and researchers). In all, 14 people participated.

Head Instructors

As last year, Dr Ananda Shastri, a physics professor, and I, the Japanese Language and Culture professor, made up the two lead instructors.

Purpose of the peace studies tour

Last time, the goal of the peace studies tour was to learn in the 6 classes held before leaving about the destructive power, side effects, and the misery of atomic bombs. On site the goal was to learn about the value of peace by listening to stories of survivors, examining the drop site, and by listening to lectures given by peace researchers. This time, in the pre-session's materials, the 450 page book "War" by Gwynne Dyer was added to learn about the value of peace from a philosophical point of view, "The habit of humans to bring about war" and "Whether or not there is a moral concept to a surprise attack on civilians" along with site studies.

Student assignments

Once again, the participants who wanted to receive credit (3 credits) kept a journal (From lectures before departure until the end of the study tour) and turned them in along with a report. Among the 11 participants, there were 9 who wished to receive credit.

Questionnaire results

The questionnaire (refer to separate sheet) was conducted on the first day of lectures on January 9th, and on March 19th, 11 days after returning from the trip. Of the 10 questions, the following are where we wanted to see the change in the students' thoughts.

- Q1 Was the dropping of atomic bombs necessary or not? If it was necessary, how many?
- Q3 What is the probability of the future use of atomic weapons?
- Q 5 Does retaining atomic weapons play a role in deterring war?
- Q 6 Is it just for a nuclear country to forbid a non-nuclear country to possess nuclear materials?
- Q 10 What are your views on targeting the general public as a wartime strategy?

For Q 1, before the trip 8 people said that the dropping of atomic bombs was not necessary. This number did not change after the trip.

On Q 3, on the possibility of nuclear warfare in the future, before the trip 9 people answered that there was such a possibility. After the trip, 1 person said they did not know, making the number of people 8.

Concerning Q 5 whether the possession of nuclear bombs could be a deterrent of war, before and after the same number (6) replied: "Regarding countries with nuclear materials, in the first stages there may be some deterrent effect, but when a situation becomes serious they will be employed too quickly, so there isn't really any deterrent effect". Before leaving, one person said "There is a deterrent effect regarding non-nuclear countries" and 4 people said that "There would be a deterrent effect regardless of pre-existing conditions". After returning, 1 more person said that deterrence depended on the situation, making a total of 5.

For Q6, asking about countries with nuclear power developing and prohibiting its use and creation by other countries and the legitimacy of this, 10 people responded that no matter the conditions it is not acceptable. After returning, one person said that "There is no correct reason, but it is necessary" making the number of people that responded that no matter the conditions it is not acceptable 9.

Q 10 on targeting the general public to defeat one's enemy, before leaving 6 people answered that regardless of the situation that it was a shameful act. After returning, the number reduced to 5, and one person did not answer. 3 people before and after the study tour said that to win a war the way cannot be chosen. 2 people answered before and after the trip that they did not know.

Strange questionnaire results

Before the trip, 2 students said that the atomic bomb was not necessary, but after returning one said it was necessary. He said "without limit in numbers, it is okay to use as many as needed." The same student said that targeting the general public in war was a shameful act. This student's answers lacked consistency.

Many Americans have come to gain background knowledge of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (From the eyes of the Japanese, it is just part of some basic knowledge of the A-bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki). They are apprehensive about the possibility of nuclear war, and have doubts about the deterrent effect of retaining nuclear weapons. They became aware of the inconsistency of how nuclear weapons states forbid non-nuclear countries to have and develop said materials. The use of atomic bombs was over 60 years ago, but even now it is difficult to look at one's own use of atomic bombs objectively. For example, even in thinking about the morality of future use of nuclear weapons, they subconsciously tend to justify the past use of A-bombs, which seems to obstruct the change in their perspectives to the total ban of nuclear weapons in the future.

What I came to understand from the students' assignments

To maintain peace, one must understand the culture and history of other countries. When humans are born they are not destructive. When humans know each other, they have the power to deal with problems in a friendly way, they can reason with each other. With this in mind, look at the following 3 students' opinions.

Student A

After the trip, I feel a much more personal connection to the bombing of Hiroshima. Walking from the hotel to the hypocenter was really something; it was incredibly heartbreaking to imagine the suffering that would have surrounded me on that walk. Meeting a survivor in person was also life changing, actually hearing his story was something that I will never forget. I understand more now what it was like for the people of Hiroshima. I feel I am just beginning to understand the truly sad events that took place, though I do feel I will never really be able to comprehend the magnitude of the horror because I was not there. I've learned that the best I can do is to try to comprehend what they went through, have sympathy in my heart for them, and work to prevent this ever happening again. Perhaps I am too much of a dreamer, but I really think that war is not inherent in human nature and that it is possible for us to achieve peace. I truly hope that future generations see the day when war is a thing of the past.

Student B

A desire to communicate and understand other countries' language and culture is essential for striving for a sustainable peace. Because humans are capable of this understanding, they can be held responsible for making sure it comes about.

Student C

Peace can not exist with a world with multiple nuclear powers. With nuclear weapons comes conflict in turn, which can not create peace. Knowing another country's culture can help to create peace in the world. It creates understandings between the nations. That you must understand their language to understand their culture is very true. I started to understand their

culture and it helped me understand what they were telling me. This trip has changed the views I had on the Japanese people. I have tremendous respect for them and their culture.

Summary

There needs to be more consideration as to the knowledge, motivation, and learning abilities of the participants.

This time, the importance of peace from a philosophical point of view was most likely difficult for the students. As we must think about the damage caused by the development and experimentation of nuclear material after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it is necessary to re-examine all the course materials. For example, the tragedy of the crew members of the Daigo Fukuryu Maru, a tuna fishing boat exposed to fallout from the test explosion of a U.S. hydrogen bomb on Bikini Atoll in 1954, triggered a world-wide civil anti-nuclear weapons movement. However, later on the original anti-nuclear weapons movement in Japan was split into some groups with different viewpoints about the development and testing of nuclear technologies from the old Soviet Unions to North Korea.

Through asking questions about the morality of the past use of atomic weapons and the possibility of their future use on the questionnaire, the participating students' feelings about their own country's history being justified unconsciously showed through. Because half of the participant of the Peace Studies Tour last time were honors students, their drive to study and the difference in quality of what was turned in stood out. I expected too much this time, and although I recovered from this discouragement, it took some time. Now recovered, I plan to look back on this trip when preparing for the peace study tour to be held in 2010.