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Neo-nationalists Target Barefoot Gen
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Hiroshima atomic bomb survivor Nakazawa Keiji's manga *Barefoot Gen* (1973-1985) is widely regarded as one of the most powerful Japanese works about the Asia-Pacific War. In the decades since it was published, the series has sold millions of copies, been adapted into animated and live action films, and has been used as a part of peace education initiatives in Japanese schools and at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, which is currently holding an exhibition of Nakazawa's original artwork.

Nakazawa experienced the bombing of Hiroshima as a child. His father, brother, and sister died in conflagration that followed the blast. The horrors and hardships that he witnessed have become representative images of the bombing for generations of postwar Japanese. *Barefoot Gen* presents a multi-sided picture of Japan's wars of the 1930s and 1940s. It condemns the American decision to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki without resorting to demonization. While the atomic bombings are the main focus, Nakazawa also highlights Japanese military violence across Asia and systemic atrocities such as forced labor. The manga looks at the plight of the many Korean victims of the atomic bombs. Spanning the war years and the postwar period, *Barefoot Gen* also presents a scathing critique of the virulently anti-American wartime elites who became sycophantic Cold Warriors during the American occupation. Series protagonist Gen, a stand-in for author Nakazawa himself, even has hard words for wartime Emperor Hirohito. *Barefoot Gen* is not only one of the most enduring popular Japanese works about war, it is one of the most diverse.

When *Barefoot Gen* and other Nakazawa manga, which are even more graphic in their depiction of the Japanese military's atrocities such as the Nanking Massacre and Unit 731 human experimentation, were first serialized, the author reports that he experienced none of the harassment and threats that targeted contemporaries such as Honda Katsuichi whose *Chugoku no tabi* (A Journey to China) broke open debate about the Nanking Massacre in the early 1970s. While Nakazawa himself is not being targeted, there is now an effort afoot to block *Barefoot Gen* from being used as an educational resource in Hiroshima's schools.

This year, Hiroshima started a pilot "Peace Education Program" at six local schools with plans to expand it across the city from the 2013 school year. Selections from *Barefoot Gen*, long used informally as supplement to textbooks in many schools, will now be incorporated into official educational resources and provided to students across the district. The plan is described by the centrist *Yomiuri Shimbun* here. In the *Yomiuri*, the country's bestselling newspaper and a mainstream voice in the Japanese mediascape, the use of *Barefoot Gen* in peace education is presented as a normative, uncontroversial decision. Those with an interest in chipping away at Japan's anti-war norms, however, are now pushing for the work to be removed from classrooms.

The group *Heiwa to Anzen wo Motomeru Hibakusha-tachi no Kai* (Association of Atomic Bomb Victims for Peace and Security, website here) has pressured (thus far unsuccessfully) Hiroshima City educators to change their peace education plans and remove *Barefoot Gen*. They claim that the work is "too full of the author's opinion and ideology" and that something "neutral" should replace it.

What does this "neutrality" look like when filtered through the group's rhetoric? The *Heiwa to Anzen wo Motomeru Hibakusha-tachi no Kai* is claiming the "peace" and "hibakusha" (atomic bomb victim) mantels. First, it appears as though there are few, if any, direct victims of the 1945 bombing involved. The group's leaders describe themselves as "Second Generation Survivors" while asking "Are the people who have been speaking with 'the voices of atomic bomb survivors' really good representatives of the *hibakusha* or all of the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?" This is part of a consistent neo-nationalist trend – most writers who have come to prominence during the revisionist "boom" of the 1990s and 2000s are too young to remember the wartime "glory days" that they praise in their work. In addition, the group's selection of new figures who can apparently "speak for" the *hibakusha* and people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with more authority should be unsurprising to anyone who has followed the Japanese right. In place of Hiroshima's peace activists or *hibakusha* supporters, Tamogami Toshio and Kusaka Kimindo, rightist pundits with no real connection to the bombed cities, were brought in as the group's speakers on the August 6 anniversary of the bombing. While the group's official literature consists of a careful "realist" equation of mutually assured destruction with peace and avoids neo-nationalist shock talk about brinksmanship, their choice of Tamogami and Kusaka as speakers reveals a different ideological direction. Both have denied that the Nanking Massacre took place, citing the untruthful nature of the Chinese. Both call for nuclear armament for Japan and expanded conventional military capabilities. Both take preemptive strikes for granted. Neither, however, has shown a willingness to deal with issues such as paying for armaments during a recession, the potential for an arms race, or the wisdom of a Cold War approach to China, Japan's biggest trading partner. Coopting the voice of the *hibakusha* and "peace thought" allows them to fantasize about capabilities while not worrying about consequences.

Tamogami's tweets from Hiroshima give a summary of his major points:

"It is nuclear armed countries that wield influence in international affairs… Japan should become a nuclear-armed country capable of wielding that influence." (Here, as in his writing, Tamogami gives little idea of what this "influence" will look like. He also frames nuclear armament as a sort of existential arrival without looking at other factors. For example, are the "influential nuclear-armed countries" not also the major players on the UN Security Council? What type of "influence" could nuclear arms bring Japan without that position and how could such influence be exercised without a bellicose foreign policy that would risk alienating major trading partners?)

"I was invited to speak … by the association of Hiroshima atomic bomb survivors." (Here, Tamogami makes it appear to his over 100,000 Twitter followers that the *Heiwa to Anzen wo Motomeru Hibakusha-tachi no Kai* is the representative *hibakusha* group).

"The *Chugoku Shimbun* (Hiroshima-centered regional newspaper) reported absolutely nothing about my talk. Control of information is as bad as it is in China." (Neo-nationalists consistently claim to be taking the side of "the people", in this case even claiming the *hibakusha* position, against the "mass media". This differs little from the Limbaugh / Beck / O'Reilly pattern in the United States.)

"There isn't a single radiation expert who says that the radiation in Fukushima is dangerous to the human body." (While there is considerable debate about the effect of Fukushima radiation on the human body, there are certainly experts who warn of elevated cancer rates and myriad health impacts. Tamogami, like others on the right, is interested in playing down the potential dangers of the Fukushima accident, because he fears that it will sustain Japan's so-called "nuclear allergy" and make developing nuclear weapons, a position that has little mainstream support, even more difficult politically.)

Rightwing condemnation of *Barefoot Gen* as "anti-Japanese" is nothing new. *Hannichi manga no sekai* (The World of "Anti-Japanese" Manga) was released by *Manga Kenhanryu* (Manga Hate the Korea Wave) publisher Shinyusha in 2007. *Barefoot Gen* and similar works are condemned as "filled with suspicious ideology". Some online rightists have followed this lead and lashed out at *Barefoot Gen* for putting forward an "incorrect" version of history and "changing things around so that the atrocious acts of the Chinese Army are instead done by Japan's". These are typical lines of neo-nationalist rhetoric. *Hannichi* (anti-Japanese) is used to build a counter-public by defining who is a *real* Japanese and who is not. No less a figure than Koizumi Junichiro can be branded (as Kobayashi Yoshinori does here)"anti-Japanese" or a "national traitor" for his support of neo-liberal reforms, seen as a betrayal of the "fortress Japan" ideal of the far right which imagines keeping foreign capital and foreign bodies out while taking for granted that Japan's supposed cultural advantages will spread its economic influence abroad.

Importantly, the condemnation of *Barefoot Gen* as "unbalanced" and thus unfit for classrooms may have as much to do with downplaying the wartime suffering of Japanese civilians as it does with negating the experiences of Asian victims of Japanese militarism. The *Atarashii rekishi kyokasho* (New History Textbooks) and successor books produced by neo-nationalist educators and pundits such as Fujioka Nobukatsu and Nishio Kanji became controversial internationally because they downplayed or simply failed to mention Japan's imperial and military violence, but critics have pointed out that the books also provided scant details about the atomic bombings. The suffering of the *hibakusha* has long been a potent anti-war symbol and downplaying the bombings is a way to undermine this. Nishio, along with many far right supporters of revisionist textbooks, also argues that Japan should develop nuclear weapons. This group, however, like Tamogami and Kusaka, typically refuses to deal with any potentially negative consequences of such a decision and imagines instead a scenario in which Japanese nuclear weapons will isolate China (once again, Japan's largest trading partner) which will then collapse, returning Japan to a "natural" position of leadership in Asia.

While these developments may be important for understanding the priorities of Japan's far right, Tamogami is correct in asserting that the mainstream media shows little interest. Nakazawa Keiji is a widely-respected manga artist and on August 14, even the right-leaning *Sankei Shimbun*, which frequently presents pieces by the neo-nationalist authors described in this essay, ran an article on his most recent speaking tour in which he aims to convince a new generation of Japanese young people of the "preciousness of peace". Nuclear armament is infrequently discussed by Japanese politicians and polls are rarely held, but a 2006 TV Asahi poll revealed that just short of 82% of Japanese were opposed to the country developing nuclear arms with only 8% supportive. Despite this public opinion breakdown, however, neo-nationalist culture warriors will likely continue to crusade against *Barefoot Gen* and other works that put forward anti-militarist messages.

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Asia-Pacific Journal articles on related subjects include:

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Nakazawa Keiji, Barefoot Gen, the Atomic Bomb, and I: The Hiroshima Legacy

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