

# Memories and Records in Bureaucratic Red Tape: The Acquisition Process of *Hibakusha Techō* by the Korean Atomic Bomb Survivors

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**Abstract** | Of the total casualties from the two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, almost ten percent were ethnic Koreans who had migrated or been mobilized to Japan under colonial rule. Following the General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers' (GHQ/SCAP) repatriation policy vis-à-vis the non-Japanese, tens of thousands of Korean atomic bomb survivors hastily returned to Korea. In the divided peninsula, one of the key sites of Cold War politics in the Far East, their voices were intentionally and unintentionally silenced by the military dictatorships, as well as by social ignorance. Nevertheless, their desperate struggles continued with the support from Japanese civic groups. After several decades of legal proceedings in Japan, they became eligible for financial and medical support from the Japanese government in 2003, once they successfully obtained a *Hibakusha Techō*—a certificate that recognizes a person as having been exposed to the atomic bombs. Acquiring a Japanese *Hibakusha Techō* involves complicated paperwork, including the assembling of verified testimonies and official documents that can confirm the applicant's presence in the bombed area at the time of bombing. Unlike in Japan, where public memories and knowledge of the atomic bombings are widely acknowledged, in Korea, records, memories, and information regarding the atomic bombings are stored exclusively within family networks and the organizations of the survivors. By emphasizing the socio-cultural embeddedness, particularly within the interpersonal networks of family and local communities, this study indicates that Korean survivors' exclusion from Japan's relief policies is due to both bureaucratic red tape and socio-cultural practices. In particular, these bureaucratic procedures are structured to exclude the socio-culturally weak and alienated, such as orphans, former forced draftees, and women isolated from family networks.

**Keywords** | Korean atomic bomb survivors, Japanese *Hibakusha Techō*, memory, record, bureaucratic red tape

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## Introduction

Records show that ten percent of the total victims from the two atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were Koreans (Hiroshima-shi-Nagasaki-shi Genbaku Saigai-shi Henshū Iinkai 2005; Han'guk Wŏnp'ok P'ihaeja Hyŏphoe 1985). Yet not much has been revealed about the records and memories of these Korean victims—not in Korea, which was liberated by these atomic bombs, or in Japan, which declared itself as “the only country to have suffered atomic bombs,” or in the US, which claimed to have shortened the war and saved thousands of American and Japanese lives. Today, Japan's government and judicial authorities, including the district court and local government in Nagasaki, are one of the few places where the records and memories of the atomic bomb victims from colonial Korea continue to carry weight. This is not because the Japanese local authorities are concerned with diplomatic conflicts or historical friction that could arise from this issue; rather, it has more to do with administrative and bureaucratic procedures for evaluating those who claim to be the victims of the atomic bombings—or the *hibakusha*. Today, most of the surviving Korean victims of the atomic bombings reside in Korea, yet their experiences and memories are rarely discussed, nor are they acknowledged in Korea's official history. They resurface only when the victims undergo administrative procedures in order to acquire *Hibakusha Techō*—a local government-issued “legal authorization of the individual's experience as a victim of atomic bombing” (Yoneyama 1999, 93).

Existing literature that deals with the issue of Korean *hibakusha* has focused only on field surveys of the victims or the diplomatic and political negotiations between the Korean and Japanese governments on the issue of reparation.<sup>1</sup> This study pays particular attention to the development of relief measure policies for the atomic bomb *hibakusha* in Japan, while using ethnographic text to understand Korean survivors' process of attaining atomic bomb *hibakusha* status. It sheds light on how the experiences of Korean victims were reinterpreted and bounded within the administrative-bureaucratic procedure of

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1. Most academic research conducted in Korea on Korean atomic bomb survivors are reports of field surveys. In social sciences, a few studies recorded the interviews of survivors residing mostly in Chŏlla Province and analyzed the social context of these testimonies (Chin Chu 2004; Chŏng Kŭn-sik 2005). Others have focused on the meaning entailed in the court cases filed by Korean survivors within the context of Korea-Japan diplomatic negotiations and history reconciliation (Yi Chi-yŏng 2012; Kim Sŭng-ŭn 2012a, 2012b). In addition, some studies (Naono 2003; Kwŏn Hyŏk-tae 2009; Pak Kyŏng-sŏp 2009) shed light on the positions of the Korean survivors in the domain of “politics of memory” (Yoneyama 1999), though they did not focus exclusively on Korean survivors.

acquiring *Hibakusha Techō*—a process often neglected as a simplistic and formalized perception toward bureaucracy.

The data for this study was acquired during pre-survey discussions conducted in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 2007 for a period of two months, as well as from a field survey based mainly on the Korea Atomic Bombs Victim Association (KABVA) in 2008 and 2011. During the field surveys, I analyzed a variety of official documents and membership cards stored at KABVA, and conducted both official and unofficial interviews with the members. In addition, I have used other sources, including unofficial interviews conducted in Japan and Korea, email messages exchanged with the members of civil groups in Japan, testimonies of Korean *hibakusha*, periodical and non-periodical subscriptions published by Japan's civic groups, and conference minutes from the Japanese Diet.

## Policy and Bureaucracy as Ethnographic Text

Academic analyses of state institutions and policies have been vital to the fields of policy and public administration studies, as well as political science. For these approaches, policies are defined as administrative arrangements implemented by the government for the purpose of resolving public and social problems (Chōng Chōng-gil 1997, 51). In anthropology, however, the meaning of policy goes beyond this limited definition. Shore and Wright (1997) argue that policies are not mere administrative tools for the state or the government; instead, they must be understood as a type of immense knowledge system. Policies are ways of defining behaviors that create socially- and individually-accepted norms, ideologies, behavioral and conceptual customs, as well as the methods and technologies that reify them. In modern states, policies not only construct the framework for appropriate behavior, they also provide a wider range of purposes and principles, as they function as authorizing apparatuses for the decisions reached through these procedures.

Anthropological studies on policies inherit the tradition of political anthropology in that they focus on the study of the state, yet here “state” is not defined by the *a priori* concept employed by political economists. Sharma and Gupta (2006) once pointed out that anthropologists should abandon the conception of the state as a fixed and monolithic entity and instead focus on its ideological and material aspects. This reveals how it deviates from other institutional structures and how it affects the functions and expansion of authority within the society. In that sense, rather than accepting the state as

monolithic and relatively autonomous social structure, we must conceptualize it as the construction and embodiment of day-to-day social practices (Sharma and Gupta 2006, 9).

The method of conceptualizing the state as public text and understanding the institutions and policies of a specific government within daily practices is common in the studies of bureaucracy (Hull 2008, 2012; Heyman 2012; Deeb and Marcus 2011; Gupta 2012; Riles 2008; Das 2006). Bureaucracy is often described as the governing or ruling apparatus of modern states, and according to Weber's definition of the ideal type, its authority derives its power from legal and rational decision making processes rather than from charisma, tradition, or succession. Its operation is based on a rational and impersonal calculation of interests (Weber 1991). On the other hand, Weber argued that, in reality, day-to-day operation of bureaucracy comes about by creating and sustaining the separation between socioeconomic and social orders, as well as public and private spheres. Furthermore, he argued that the understanding of bureaucratization or bureaucratic rationalization as an embodied social phenomenon of capitalistic modernity should not be restrained to the realm of state affairs but must be applied to every aspect of modern society. By extending bureaucratic institutions and procedures to all social spheres, its functions become important, modern instrument to appease civil disobedience and legitimize the order set up to prevent social changes.

The shared interests among recent ethnographical studies on the operation of bureaucracy can be interpreted in line with Weber's observation of bureaucracy (Hull 2008, 2012; Göpfert 2013; Feldman 2008; Lavie 2012; Kravel-Tovi 2012; Gupta 2012). Public service in modern society operates on the basis of written documents, rather than on interpersonal exchange. Weber explained that the collective body of clerical workers constitutes a passive bureaucracy that engages in public services based on document compilation and management of these files (Weber 1978, 957, quoted in Hull 2012, 11).

On the other hand, what recent studies call the "states' bureaucratic administrations," comprised of bureaucracies, documental agents, and their operations, must be understood not simply as public and objective entities. They are also a constitutive substance of a society within which these institutions are founded upon material bases (Heyman 2012, 1270). Bureaucratic governance is itself a construction of social relations based on unique social, cultural, and linguistic spheres, yet at the same time it shares mutually constitutive elements with society, politics, and science. What Long (1992) characterized as "interface" is a point of intersection between states, science—or more broadly, knowledge—and civil society (quoted in Heyman 2012, 1270). In that sense, earlier

anthropological approaches toward states through the analyses of policies focused too heavily on knowledge accumulation and discourse analyses, yet these research efforts must be complementary with the newly rising trends that shed light on the document-based practices of bureaucracy. By following the process through which a specific problem becomes socially acknowledged and institutionalized, and then bureaucratically handled, state authority becomes one of “anthropologically-diagnosable diverse locus and texts” (Trouillot 2003).

In this context, this study regards the formation of the policy field vis-à-vis the victims of atomic bombings and the issuance process of *Hibakusha Techō* as one ethnographic text. The process through which Korean victims of atomic bombings acquire *Hibakusha Techō* is an administrative-bureaucratic procedure that reflects the history of Korean atomic bomb survivors. At the same time, preparing application documents and going through the screening process in Japan is also a process of reconstructing their individual historical experiences as *hibakusha* by recording personal memories that are rarely discussed in Korean society. The first half of this study sheds light on the formation process of such administrative-bureaucratic procedures, and considers their historical meaning within the history of Japan’s postwar compensation. In the following section, I will evaluate the history of Korean atomic bomb survivors, whose experiences vacillated between Japan’s national discourse of victimization and Korea’s lack of official recognition regarding their struggles. In doing so, rather than focusing on comparative discourse analyses, I will illuminate how these experiences are ingrained in the bureaucratic documents and elucidate the constructive and exclusive aspects of these bureaucratic procedures.

### **Drawing National Borders on Relief Measures for Japanese *Hibakusha* and Bureaucratic Reterritorialization**

In 1957, twelve years after the dropping of the atomic bombs, the Japanese government enacted the Act on Medical Care for Atomic Bomb *Hibakusha*, which became the basis for relief policies for Japanese *hibakusha*. However, this law was not designed to provide government compensation; rather, it was introduced for the purpose of maintaining public health and welfare. The government’s decision to contain the victims’ demand for compensation within medical care-related social welfare policy was met by severe opposition, and the proposed plans for medical treatment was also criticized for its inadequacy. The 1963 Tokyo District Court ruling urged the state to take appropriate measures for the aid of *hibakusha*, as “the severity of the damages inflicted upon the

atomic bomb survivors is incomparable to what was caused by ordinary warfare.” Following this court order, the government enacted the complementary Act on Special Measures for Atomic Bomb *Hibakusha* in 1968, which, along with the 1957 Medical Care Act for Atomic Bomb *Hibakusha*, became the basis for relief policies for the Japanese *hibakusha*. In 1994, the two legislations were integrated into the Act on Relief for Atomic Bomb *Hibakusha*.

On the other hand, the intricacy of this politically sensitive matter went beyond Japan’s domestic realm. The complexity of the issue became apparent in the post-colonial relations between Japan and its former subjects, who no longer possessed Japanese nationality or resided in Japanese territory. Although the victims of the atomic bombings held the government accountable for their injuries, by introducing the Medical Care Act for Atomic Bomb *Hibakusha*, the government attempted to reduce its responsibility to the domain of public health and welfare. Paradoxically, such circumvention of responsibility and compensation led to the implementation of related welfare policies and came to bear significant consequences on the development of the issue. Convention had dictated that policies related to social welfare would apply only to those who resided in Japan, thus neither the Act on Medical Care for Atomic Bomb *Hibakusha* nor the Act on Special Measures for Atomic Bomb *Hibakusha* included the nationality clause. Because of this, these two pieces of legislation became an important instrument for the *hibakusha* who resided outside Japanese territory when demanding compensation from the Japanese government. In particular, the survivors who resided in Korea induced a critical turning point for the development of relief measures in Japan.

After the signing of the Korea-Japan Normalization Treaty, *Zainichi* Korean groups and anti-nuclear advocate groups in Hiroshima began acknowledging the existence of atomic bomb survivors residing in Korea and called for the establishment of a support group to help the Korean victims. Following these developments, the Korea Atomic Bombs Victim Support Association (predecessor of KABVA) was established in 1968, and they began sending out appeals to plead their cases not only to the Korean government, but also to the Japanese and US embassies in Korea. From the late 1960s to the early 1970s, there was a movement among the survivors residing in Pusan that they should go to Japan to receive medical treatment, even if it meant that some of them must enter the country illegally. In particular, Son Chin-du’s illegal entry into Japan and his filing of a lawsuit against the Japanese government for the issuance of *Hibakusha Techō* in the early 1970s was critical. The case exposed the limitations of the Japanese government’s relief measures, which were strictly restricted to its residents. In 1978, Japan’s Supreme Court ordered the government to issue a

*Hibakusha Techō* to Son Chin-du, reversing the earlier interpretation of the two legislations. The court claimed that the two laws included stipulations for government compensation to the *hibakusha*, rather than merely a guarantee of medical or social welfare. Therefore, the ruling concluded that, regardless of the person's nationality or area of residency, if one can prove that he or she was indeed the survivor of the atomic bombing, they would be eligible for a *Hibakusha Techō*. For a while, the ruling of the Son Chin-du case seemed to pave the way for the non-Japanese victims to receive relief measures from the Japanese government, regardless of their countries of residency.

Despite this Supreme Court ruling, however, the government made explicit efforts to trivialize the meaning of the phrase “attributes of government compensation” that appeared in the verdict. First, the Ministry of Health and Welfare issued circular note No. 402, which stated that, in order for those who are issued the *Hibakusha Techō* to be eligible for medical care and benefits, the person must be residing within Japanese territory. Furthermore, in response to the Japanese people's demand to upgrade relief measures from social welfare to government compensation, the government defended its position by claiming that the Supreme Court's decision did not presuppose Japan's war responsibility. Rather, they claimed, the Japanese government, as the only nation to have suffered nuclear attacks, has the responsibility to aid those “who have suffered unprecedented injuries and damages, and the degree of assistance provided must be determined in balance with those who are also suffering from the consequences of other conventional warfare” (Hiroshima-ken 2011). Simply put, at the core of Japan's relief policies towards the atomic bomb *hibakusha* lay the idea of acceptance—that damages caused by regular warfare must simply be endured—and a balancing of compensatory measures between other citizens who had also been exposed to wartime destruction.

Despite these measures, some Korean survivors who could not receive compensation from the Korean government or find a way to receive the necessary treatments began searching for a way to go to Japan and acquire the *Hibakusha Techō* as a temporary solution. In the early 1980s, the two governments launched a joint effort to establish a system in Japan to provide medical care for the Korean *hibakusha*. For Korean survivors around this time period, the *Hibakusha Techō* was not only a symbolic instrument through which to make their sufferings known to Japanese society, but it was also the only way to receive medical treatment for their physical conditions.

In the early 2000s, a lawsuit filed by Kwak Kwi-hun provided another critical turning point to Japan's relief policies for the Korean *hibakusha*. This lawsuit highlighted the issue of circular note No. 402, which limited the validity of the

*Hibakusha Techō* only to those in Japanese territory, a claim that Osaka District Court had recognized as illegal. But even after the court recognized the illegality of the No. 402 note in 2002, the Ministry of Health and Welfare continued to abide by their original position that the application and issuance processes of *Hibakusha Techō* must be conducted within Japanese territory, imposing a limitation on those who were unable to go to Japan due to their physical condition or advanced age. As of 2012, there were a number of pending cases regarding the discriminatory practices against overseas *hibakusha* by failing to provide necessary medical care and benefits for the treatment of atomic bomb-related conditions.

The court ruling that entitled all *Hibakusha Techō* holders, regardless of the country of residency, to the benefits prescribed in the Act on Relief for Atomic Bomb *Hibakusha* seems to guarantee the extraterritorial application of the law. In reality, however, it became clear that the logic of bureaucratic procedure and rationalization was contained within its own rules, comprised of the nation-state's inner rationale and boundaries, highlighting Japan's efforts to maintain territorial boundary. In other words, extraterritorial application of the relief policies must be contextualized as one of Japan's reterritorialization processes. And this mechanism is created and maintained through the bureaucratic administrative system, as well as through the nationalized sense of victimization as "the only country to have suffered atomic bombs," an identity that has become one of the cornerstones of postwar Japanese nationalism. Building upon this, the next section will evaluate how the delayed extraterritorial application and bureaucratic restriction of the Relief Act relate to the process of attaining *Hibakusha Techō* among the Korean survivors.

## Writing out Memories on Temporal-Spatial Coordinates of Application Forms

When carrying out a policy, prescribing a clear-cut legal definition of the would-be beneficiaries of the policy is not simply a rhetorical or conceptual task set up to describe a specific collective group (Gieryn 1983, 792). By authorizing legal entitlement, such procedure substantiates and legitimizes a disproportionate distribution of resources between those who receive government aid and those who do not (Lynch 2004, 165). By granting a certain term or title to the members of a categorized group, the authority assigns related rights and duties while guaranteeing decisive benefits; at the same time, this practice is accompanied by controlling eligibility through a structured network built upon



rigorously-regulated qualifying mechanisms and an administrative screening process (Lynch 2004, 166). Through this course of development, the *hibakusha*, who demanded government compensation, become the subject of relief policies, and the state, having the power to structure and control government resources, becomes the dominant actor.

When the Medical Care Act was enacted, the screening process relied on administrative records (victim certificates) that proved the person's presence in the bombed area, written and verbal verifications from government institutions and officials, as well as personal testimonies. While these methods underwent minor changes over time, documenting official records and witnesses, as well as their own memories of experience, remained the most fundamental aspect of the process. The scientific diagnosis was insufficient at that time because of the uncertainties regarding the impact of radiation exposure. Unless the person had visible, physical injuries, it was impossible to provide biologically or medically meaningful standards to classify a *hibakusha*. In that sense, the ruling of Nagasaki District Court in September 2012 was symbolic by ordering the government to grant plaintiff Chang Yŏng-jun a *Hibakusha Techō* based solely on his own testimonies—despite the fact that he was unable to provide official records or witnesses. This ruling, ordered sixty-eight years after the atomic bomb attacks, illustrates how the issuing of *Hibakusha Techō* had been constrained by bureaucratic red tape (Todeschini 1999). This red tape consisted of the victim's need to fulfill the necessary requirements—finding domestically-produced official records and the witnesses who had access to those records, as well as documenting and proving these experiences. And this “bureaucratic rite of passing” (Krael-Tovi 2012) began with the application form.

The application form of *Hibakusha Techō*, like any other official document, is stylized in accordance with a specific format and guidelines. Filling out the application documents becomes a process of conversion or reclamation during which the victim evokes past experiences and directs them to a specific narrative. As one victim aptly put it, writing the application resembles writing a novel, and it requires an enormous amount of information. The applicants are required to provide not only the facts that can be found in the census register, including the details of family members and their address in Japan, but also the circumstances of the bombing—whom they were with, whether they were outside or inside a building, if there were shielding objects surrounding them, the characteristics of those objects, the places where they sought shelter or where they settled in the city afterwards, and so forth.

In 2003, the Korean Red Cross (KRC) Special Welfare Services was entrusted with the application procedures for *Hibakusha Techō* by the Japanese government,

and ever since, all official paperwork has been carried out via the KRC. In many cases, those who are knowledgeable about these processes help the applicants at local KABVA branches. It is not common for a researcher to assist them in filling out the application forms. Yet during my interviews with the survivor, or when I encountered Korean victims who had come to Hiroshima to apply for the *Hibakusha Techō*, I found myself more informed about the circumstances of the day the bombing occurred. On several occasions, they explained their experiences and provided related information for filling out the necessary forms. During these oral, autobiographical interviews, I imparted information and confirmed some of the details of their stories, such as the towns they resided in Japan, surrounding buildings, and important spatial locations. They attempted to scrape up the memories of the distant past for the “bureaucratic rite of passing” which required the victims to objectively describe what happened on that day. What I collected during my field research—a variety of testimonies, written notes, videos, transcripts, remaining monuments in Hiroshima and Nagasaki—became helpful in rearranging those memories that had become too vague or ambiguous over the years. This rather unusual relationship between the *hibakusha* and myself shows how constrained the application process was for the Korean victims and it was not simply due to language barriers.

Writing the application form for the *Hibakusha Techō* is a process of rearranging one’s own memories or what he or she has been told by parents or relatives regarding the circumstances of the bombing, in order to fit them into the appropriate framework. Unlike in Korea, in Japan large amounts of information have been accumulated regarding the damage caused by the atomic bombings. This information is circulated in the form of visual and written reconstructions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki’s landscape, as well as biomedical and legal records. Individual experiences and memories are (re)constructed by referring to or complying with the visual and written sources or legal, medical, and institutional discourses produced within the society. Manuals for the Measures for Atomic Bombing Survivors, exhibitions at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, as well as annual broadcasting programs featuring the atomic bombing are all filled with accurate data and scientific terms regarding the damage caused by the explosions. Precise data on causalities, heat temperature, intensity, and altitudes of the explosions help the victims explain their physical impairments and reconstruct their memories, and their diverse recollections are reinterpreted in relation to that data. Many people I encountered in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, both victims and non-victims, were knowledgeable of the distance between the epicenter of the blast and where they were when the explosion occurred. Furthermore, many monuments in the cities show the

distance from the center of explosion. Annual memorial ceremonies held on August 6 and 9 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki are designed according to such concentric circles surrounding the cities.

The atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki have become one of the essential axes of Japan's postwar nationalism, intertwined with the nationalized sense of victimization. Yoneyama (1999), who observed how the lives of atomic bomb victims intersected with Hiroshima's urban space and political nature of its memories, argued that this urban spatial reenactment obfuscates Japan's war responsibility and instead presents Hiroshima and Nagasaki as symbols of the state's victimhood. Despite these criticisms, however, the monuments, memorial ceremonies, and documentary programs provide an important mnemonic detour for Japan's official history, as well as for the individual *hibakusha*. Here, official history and individual memories can contradict one another, yet even such variances are intertwined with this detour.

Unlike in Japan, where memories and records regarding the atomic bombs are linked to a nationalized sense of victimization and circulated in the public sphere, in Korea, they were presented only within a specific community as the product of private experiences. If a victim did not have an opportunity to share the information through the support organization or relatives, any temporal-spatial experiences of the bombings would remain within his or her individual sphere. And talking about those very experiences, which were, in their words, "unimaginable," "inexplicable," and "unspeakable," was only possible from their personal perspectives. If we consider the socio-cultural constraints of memories and records, as well as the ability to learn within a society, the Korean survivors rarely encounter the "official story about the bombs" on which they could recollect or confirm their own experiences.

Instead, in the process of preparing the application paperwork for the *Hibakusha Techō*, the recollection of one's memories generally takes place while sharing their past traumas with their family and relatives. This familial network, within which the victims' personal stories and experiences are shared and discussed, function not only as a channel of distribution, but as a critical process in every step of the way toward acquiring the *Hibakusha Techō*. Their stories range from their parents' migration to prewar Japan and their return to Korea to joining the KABVA and gathering information on how to attain Japan's *Hibakusha Techō*. Some survivors in Korea, who had been completely unaware of the relief benefits, happened to hear about the policies at family gatherings and ended up applying for the *Hibakusha Techō*. The role of the victims' families is quite significant in that, even when they themselves have no memories of being exposed to the atomic bombings, the testimonies written by the relatives

(sometimes survivors themselves) often corroborate their eligibility and in the end lead to successfully acquiring the *Hibakusha Techō*.

On the other hand, for those who are not part of the socio-cultural network, the responsibility of preparing all the necessary documents falls entirely in their hands, reducing the chances of obtaining the *Hibakusha Techō*. In other words, the process of writing out the experiences of the atomic bombing on temporal-spatial coordinates is restrained by the sheer lack of information on the layout of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, as well as the inability to supplement and corroborate their vague recollections. For those who were exposed to the atomic bombings at a young age and became orphans after returning to Korea, or the uneducated, mobilized laborers who worked in factories on the outskirts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (in Nagasaki, there were some cases in which the Koreans who worked in coal mines in small islands away from the city center were temporarily mobilized to the city for the disposal of dead bodies after the bombing), it becomes more difficult to write out their own experiences. Partial and fragmented memories are often inconsistent, and it becomes extremely challenging to rearrange such unorganized information on temporal-spatial coordinates.

As a result, those who were isolated from laborers the socio-cultural network—orphans, elderly females, and mobilized laborers—are least likely to succeed in acquiring the *Hibakusha Techō*. They are less likely to be informed of the relief measures available to them, and they lack the necessary socio-cultural capital to develop their memories and records into official documents.

## Mediation through Records and Experiences of the Evaluation Process

Once the survivors complete the application forms, they must then gather the official records that can prove their validity. With the enactment of the Medical Care Act, the Ministry of Health and Welfare designated the kind of documentation that would be accepted as official certificates for the exposure to atomic bombings: (1) victim certificates or other documents issued by administrative offices; (2) when (1) is unavailable, other records such as letters or pictures that were written or taken at the time; (3) if neither (1) nor (2) is available, other certificates issued by the Hiroshima and Nagasaki governors (*Hibakusha Engo Hōrei Kenkyūkai* 2003, 200). For those who do not have any of these documents, the government allowed two or more bystanders' testimonies (excluding those written by relatives beyond a third degree of

kinship) to be submitted as substitutes. In addition, the government added a clause that permitted “other victims’ certificates, statements of facts or written pledges to be submitted as substitutes” when none of the above records exist.

However, this method of adopting records produced in Japan as proof of exposure to the atomic bombings became a disadvantage for those who returned to Korea after the war. While sorting out family properties and taking care of surviving relatives in order to return home in the aftermath of the bombings, few Korean survivors obtained official documents or certificates issued by local governments or public authorities. Instead, in most cases, the Korean applicants submitted residency certificates that could prove that they were living in Hiroshima or Nagasaki when the bombings occurred. For example, Yang Chŏm-i, who was exposed to the bomb in Hiroshima but “had no idea what an atomic bomb was,” met a person from Kure<sup>2</sup> who told her about the *Hibakusha Techō* ten years ago. When she lived in Hiroshima, she worked at the Postal Savings Bureau after graduating from a secondary school. When she applied for *Hibakusha Techō*, her name was found on the old staff list. Even though the list was not an officially-issued victim certificate, it was considered a quasi-official record produced in Japan. In other cases, sealed identification pictures for mobilized laborers, driver’s licenses, and report cards have also been recognized as certificates of the victims’ residency in Hiroshima or Nagasaki at the time of the bombings.

Needless to say, only those who were affiliated with public institutions as laborers or students during the wartime in Hiroshima or Nagasaki would have access to documents like victim certificates, work records, or authoritative lists of victims. At that time, however, the unemployment rate was high among Koreans in Japan, and most of them worked as daily laborers in construction or were self-employed in their own small businesses (Kim Kwang-yŏl 2010, 236). Considering that the majority of Koreans living in Japan at the time were low-class laborers, it was highly likely that many of them did not have any official certificates issued by public institutions.

Despite the fact that those records are the most important way to certify their experiences as *hibakusha*, in reality, few Korean victims possess individual records. Instead, the victims’ or family members’ birth and death records that appear on census registers become critical in confirming their whereabouts at the time of the bombings.

Yet the census registers were also often inadequate. At that time, it was the

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2. Coastal city located east of Hiroshima City, it held strategic importance for Imperial Navy during the war.

individuals' responsibility to file any changes made to the register, such as births, deaths, or changes of address, and in most cases it was the responsibility of the head of the family (or other male family member) to report them to the authorities (Yang Hyunah 2000; Im Kyōng-t'aek 2012). Filing of the official records in a prompt and accurate manner was not an easy task. There were several instances in which the head of the household was killed in bombing raids, and parents were unable to register the birth of their child in the turmoil of the war. In addition, the census register stored at the municipal office in Korea was burned down during the Korean War.<sup>3</sup>

Simply put, even if they had managed to obtain official certificates that proved their residencies in Hiroshima or Nagasaki, the upheaval of the Korean War made the survival of those documents extremely unlikely. The “triple afflictions”—the atomic bombing, Korean War, and neglect—(Ichiba 2003) that the Korean survivors endured are ingrained in the individuals' experiences of preserving these official records.

After a screening process, the issuing of *Hibakusha Techō* is completed with a stamp of the local governor's seal. This concluding point represents not only the government's exercise of power as the issuer of the *techō*, but also the incorporation of Korean *hibakusha* into Japan's relief policy system. In particular, during the complex screening process, which goes side by side with bureaucratic indifference (Herzfeld 1992), the Korean survivors re-encounter the Japanese government, the agent of colonial rule in the past.

Drawing upon bureaucratic regulations that attach more importance to documents and evidence than face-to-face interviews in evaluating the potential beneficiaries, a local authority refused the issuance of *Hibakusha Techō* to an applicant who was unable to provide sufficient evidence, such as a census register, government certificates, or witnesses, even though the applicant claimed, “If I was lying, I could not have told that many details about Nagasaki.” Such statements symbolize the unintended consequences of a bureaucratic practice mediated by documents. The complexity of the screening process mediated by documents and records, coupled with feelings of contrition and anguish toward the former colonial ruler, breeds convoluted sentiments among the Korean victims. Yet as they wait for the result, which revolves around bureaucratic indifference and interviews, these sentiments cannot help but turn into unfocused tension. Their personal feelings toward Japan impose absolutely

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3. The records of a Japan-born Korean resident, even if filed in Japan, were sent over to the place of origin, the hometown of his or her father in Korea, to be registered. A significant number of census registers kept in Hapchōn area were lost when the town was burnt down during the Korean War.

no impact on such administrative-bureaucratic procedures, and the Korean victims' reunion with their former colonial ruler is inundated only with the anxiety that they may not be eligible to receive government benefits. The outcome of the screening process is structured to allow the systematic exclusion of those who are relatively more deprived of bureaucratically-appropriate records and evidence. These mechanisms of exclusion operate most disadvantageously to those who were most severely injured by the atomic bombing, those who were excluded from familial networks after returning to Korea, and the mobilized laborers whose residency cannot be proven by the census registers.

However, the paradox that emerged during the operation of relief measures for the survivor is not necessarily the result of the government's or the bureaucracy's ill intention but stems from the contradiction and ambivalence intrinsic to the process of policy implementation and bureaucratic governance. Hull's (2008, 2012) works have focused on document-based bureaucratic governance and semiotic technologies of modern states. Semiotic technologies are both symbolic and physical instruments to produce, interpret, and control the meanings for a specific purpose or goal. These studies also show that governance grounded upon documents, as well as semiotic presentations that rely on physical documents and records, inherently presuppose the purpose of control, and these interests can conflict with those of others. While authorized records that exist in the form of documents—regardless of the accuracy of the information—become powerful facts within the bureaucratic system, the victims' experiences, if they are not recognized as “official records” in written form, have no such claim. The power embedded in official documents and records invites the fraud and manipulation ubiquitous in modern society, such as paper patients and fake beneficiaries of social welfare, forged registration, and forgery of official and unofficial documents. On the other hand, however, this supremacy of documents perpetually marginalizes those who are unable to obtain them. While states have come to establish these control measures in order to increase the veracity of the conditions, the system contains in itself an ambivalence that is biased against those without “official documents” (Hull 2008, 503).

## Personal Guides for the Application Process

There are several ways for the Korean survivor to receive the *Hibakusha Techō*. The applicants may apply through the agency service at the KRC or they may go

to Japan and apply directly by themselves. However, before the KRC's Special Welfare Services was entrusted with handling these cases, and even today, the most popular method is to be guided through the process with someone "who knows their way around" and "has the know-how." Ever since it was left up to individuals to apply for the *Hibakusha Techō*, the survivor without special skills or family connections in Japan relied on personal guides during the application process. Even today, there are advantages to this method, compared to applying through the KRC.

One of the reasons that Korean survivors choose to apply directly, rather than applying through Special Welfare Services, is to reduce the processing time. It takes at least six months to a year, or in some cases up to two years, for the applicants to complete the bureaucratic procedures alone (for cases applied during the 2003-2009 period). What is called "bureaucratic time" (Hoag 2011, 86) applies equally to the Korean survivors.<sup>4</sup> They have virtually no way of knowing how their evaluations are proceeding in Japan; the applicants must wait to find out if they are eligible. In fact, there are a few cases in which applicants passed away while they were waiting for the results. This slow pace is often criticized as one of the means to delay the procedure and keep government expenditures to a minimum. On the other hand, if they apply directly in Japan with the help of a personal guide, it takes only about a week for the result to come out. The financial burden falls on the applicants, yet it can reduce a significant amount of time and uncertainty, largely mitigating the survivor's frustration and impatience.

Yet the reduction of time is not the only reason that the Korean survivors prefer applying with help from a personal guide. As mentioned above, paperwork and preparing for interviews are not straightforward tasks for those who are unaccustomed to these bureaucratic procedures. Yet the process can become streamlined if one obtains assistance from someone who has gone through them before. The personal guides are usually quite knowledgeable when it comes to the conditions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the kind of stories that need to be written down on the application forms. They are well-informed of other steps as well, such as where to obtain the required official documents or what kinds of answers are appropriate to give during the interviews.

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4. Hoag (2011) pointed out that, while it is a critical operating principle for bureaucracy, "bureaucratic time" is also an important resource for the bureaucrats to maneuver in establishing a relationship with its customer, i.e. the citizens. For instance, by delaying the administrative procedures in issuing a re-entry permit, the bureaucracy can impose uncertainty on the person's future. During this process, excessive and repetitive delays could instigate an abandonment of the request or function as an unspoken incentive for bribes.



They also translate crucial components of the paperwork into Japanese before the evaluation, check all the necessary information required during the screening process, and make travel arrangements for the flight, accommodation, and food. They are fluent in Japanese, know Hiroshima well, and they have accumulated the tacit knowledge from having gone through similar procedures repeatedly. Especially before 2003, Korean survivors who wished to apply for the *Hibakusha Techō* had to go to Japan and undergo the bureaucratic procedures at their own expense. Unless the applicant was fluent enough in Japanese to prepare these documents, make travel arrangements, and inform him/herself of the details of Japan's bureaucratic systems and evaluation process, it became necessary to seek out help from acquaintances, relatives, or civic groups in Japan. The fact that, almost without exception, these Korean guides were born in the 1920s-'30s and received elementary or secondary education in Japan signifies the importance of socio-cultural capital in the process of acquiring the *Hibakusha Techō*. At the beginning of my field research, I was quite skeptical about this aspect, yet such misgiving gradually abated as I observed the complexity of the procedures. Some personal guides receive small, unofficial fees for the services they provide, but as I came to find out, the fees were negligible, considering the government benefits and medical care provided for the members of KABVA, which they would receive after successfully acquiring the *Hibakusha Techō*.

However, rather than working with personal guides for whom the applicants themselves must bear the financial and transaction costs, many Korean survivors rely on the support of civic groups in Japan. The Association of Citizens for Supporting South Korean Atomic Bomb Victims (*Kankoku no Genbaku Higaisha o Kyūensuru Shimin no Kai*, so-called *Shiminkai*) and Citizens Alliance for *Hibakusha* in South Korea (*Zai-Kan Hibakusha Mondai Shimin Kaigi*, so-called *Shimin Kaigi*) have long worked with the survivors in Korea, supporting a variety of legal pledges. Some of the members of these civic groups actively take charge by helping those without the *Hibakusha Techō* acquire them. As Japanese citizens, most of them have a deep understanding of the Korean atomic bomb survivor issue and have accumulated tacit knowledge regarding the atomic bombings and the administrative procedures related to the screening processes. All the financial costs of the application process are covered by donations raised by these groups.

In the process of acquiring the *Hibakusha Techō*, these civic groups in Japan assume a great significance. Their support activities constitute an effort to understand the Korean *hibakusha's* anguish through their personal interaction, as they rediscover the memories of the past and uncover forgotten records. Needless to say, these efforts are not free from the limitations inherent in the

administrative-bureaucratic control mechanisms. Even so, such practices must be understood as a process of evoking records and memories that were buried within the history of inhumane crimes from colonial rule, the waging of war, and forced mobilization, to the dropping of atomic bombs that targeted civilian areas and the historical wrongdoings of the US, Japan, and Korea, who neglected their own peoples' sufferings.

It is significant that those who support the Korean survivor are not Korean civic groups or government institutions, but Japanese citizens whose sense of indebtedness derives from the remorse that their own nation instigated the war and imposed colonial rule. By responding to the suffering of the Korean survivor, Japan's civil society established a sense of solidarity with their Korean counterpart. Such reciprocity is closely related to the shock of re-encountering Japan's former colonial subjects, who had long disappeared from postwar Japan's national discourse, a discourse that focused on Japan as the "the only country to have suffered atomic bombs" and viewed the *hibakusha* as symbolic cornerstone of peace. Japan's self-awareness as the world's only atomic bombing victim is one of the most widely used tropes of mainstream nationalism, which seeks to obfuscate the responsibility of its colonial rule and warfare. At the same time, however, such one-sided rhetoric bred self-awareness of the internal contradiction within Japanese civil society, and it came to function as a critical factor in response to the pleas from the Korean survivors. In that sense, from a political-sociological perspective, Japan's postwar discourse contains in itself both ambivalent and paradoxical aspects.<sup>5</sup>

## Conclusion

For Koreans applying for the *Hibakusha Techō*, Japan's state authority, usually nothing more than an abstract concept, becomes increasingly real as their experiences are carefully scrutinized through documents and interviews. During this process, the Japanese government holds a monopolistic authority as the issuer of the *Hibakusha Techō* while evaluating the authenticity of the

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5. Several studies have suggested that by promoting history reconciliation between Korea and Japan, it is possible to incorporate the importance of interpersonal, cultural exchanges founded upon individuals' experiences and understandings (Palmer 2013), the ability to discern the contradictions embedded in "victimhood nationalism" and hereditary sense of victimization (Lim Jie-Hyun 2012; Lim Jie-Hyun and Sakai 2003), and ultimately the "inherited responsibility" that derives from such consciousness (Miller and Kwak Chun-hyök 2009, 111-12). This case shows that such theoretical concepts become integrated on a practical level and set their limitations.

presented documents, records, and memories. As the Korean survivors await the verdicts, their recollections of the colonial period—during which they endured the “smell of the Japs [sic] (*waenom*) and soy sauce”—combine with their memories of the atomic bombs, until they ultimately become restructured into the statement of the circumstances in which they present themselves as *hibakusha*. Only after completing this bureaucratic rite of passing do they gain the official status as Japan’s overseas *hibakusha*. Their distress over the years in Korea after losing family and returning from Japan becomes abridged into one certificate that records the time and place where he or she became a *hibakusha*, only to be stored away in drawers, never to be disclosed to others.

This study sheds light on the often overlooked aspects of power and socio-cultural context in documents-mediated bureaucratic practices through an ethnographical study on Korean atomic bomb survivors’ process of acquiring *Hibakusha Techō*. In the case of Korean victims, the context of authority underwent a continuous change throughout the postwar period. First their struggles were directed towards the Korean government, then to Japan, before becoming entwined within the post-liberation context of Korea-Japan relations. Furthermore, this study shows that, even though Japan’s policy measures vis-à-vis the *hibakusha* were intended to aid those who survived the atomic bombings, when put into bureaucratic practice, they functioned in a way that excluded and discriminated against those who suffered the most. Because of this, it was highly likely that these policy measures would not be able to achieve its original goal of supporting the *hibakusha*.

This study sustains Weber’s claim that when we assume bureaucracy, as the basis of modern governance, functions based on instrumental rationality, it cannot guarantee the substantive rationality to achieve stable governance. It implies that policy studies should not be limited to the discourse analyses of the policies’ formation processes, but it is necessary to analyze bureaucratic practices as well as the socio-cultural customs in implementing these policies. Responding to Gupta’s (2012) point that anthropologists must explain why and how a certain bureaucratic program succeeds or fails, this study argues that it becomes clearer when we pay attention to who gains or loses the most from the way in which the bureaucratic instrument of control is structured in specific socio-cultural contexts. Furthermore, in understanding the governance of modern states, anthropologists must be more attentive to the emergence and development of the ambivalent and contradictory practices and effects of bureaucratic governance. In other words, rather than presupposing perfect governance and the formation of disciplined, inner panoptic monitoring, it is necessary to focus on the underlying deficiency, uncertainty, incompetence, and

possibility of failure of the bureaucratic instrument of control. Only by doing so can field-based empirical studies on diverse policies and their implementations be enriched and the process of state governance formed, altered, and reiterated in modern society be better understood.

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