



photograph by author, 2003

The 'Dwelling of Remembrance' monument dedicated to victims of the Tokyo air raids

Memorializing the Tokyo air raids

Tokyo occupies a peculiar place in Japan's landscape of war memory. As capital city and host to Yasukuni Shrine and other national sites of memory, it figures prominently. Yet as a city lived and experienced by its residents, it seems a place where history holds little sway. Where are the memorials and museums that remember the dead and try to make sense of the 100,000 civilians who perished in the air raid of 10 March 1945, which initiated the US government's embrace of urban terror bombing as a legitimate form of warfare? Where are the places through which Tokyoites have attempted to understand and convey the violence that the Japanese government allowed to be inflicted upon the city's inhabitants in the closing months of the war?

Cary Karacas

Unlike many places in Japan - most notably Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Okinawa - Tokyo to date has not erected a prominent memorial space to serve as a vital if imperfect reminder of the tragedies inflicted by the war. Indeed, markers of Tokyo being laid waste by incendiary bombs in 1945 are so peripheral that most Tokyoites would be hard pressed to locate them. There is, however, a public air raid memorial in a small park just north of the popular Edo-Tokyo Museum. Constructed by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and dedicated in 2001, the semi-circular, flower-covered granite monument, according to its dedication plaque, is meant 'to mourn and remember the over 100,000 civilians killed in the air raids, as well as promote the pursuit of peace by acting as a permanent reminder of the tragedy that occurred'. Examining how this particular structure came into being gives us a sense of the determinants that have contributed to how the Tokyo air raids have and haven't been publicly remembered.

Let's begin with where the memorial is located, in Sumida ward's Yokoami Park. On 1 September 1923, after a major earthquake struck the metropolis, tens of thousands of people from a working class quarter of the city took refuge from the spreading fires by fleeing to the two hectare park, only to lose their lives as a firestorm swept upon them. Tokyoites came to identify the park with this catastrophe and turned it into a sacred space of sorts: the city government and citizens erected Earthquake Memorial Hall and a charnel house to hold the victims' remains, as well as a museum and numerous memorials to remember the disaster and its human toll. Just fifteen years after the celebration of the capital's reconstruction and Yokoami Park's inauguration in 1930, catastrophe re-visited the city, as incendiary bombs made refugees of millions and reduced half the metropolis to a wasteland filled with charred corpses.

The metropolitan government quickly buried most of the air raid victims in mass graves located in parks, temple precincts, and on private land, where they remained for several years. Dissension between interest groups on where victims' remains should permanently be stored caused the Occupation's General Headquarters to order the metropolitan government to use the charnel house in Yokoami Park. The government did so, putting the cremated remains of 105,000 air raid victims next to the ashes of the 58,000 victims of the 1923 disaster. Since 1950, the city has sponsored Buddhist memorial services for both groups every 1 September and 10 March. Besides these services, few public remembrances of the Tokyo air raids occurred for 25 years. Censorship during the occupation, the exclusive focus on the suffering in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Tokyo's first postwar governor's desire to reconstruct a 'light' or *akarui* Tokyo, and the fact that women, children, and the elderly in a working class part of the city bore the brunt of the catastrophe all contributed to this relative silence.

Remembering catastrophe in Tokyo and Asia

In an important shift in 1970, Tokyo governor Minobe Ryōkichi - a self-described 'flexible utopian socialist' - offered to fund the newly formed Society for Recording the Tokyo Air Raids to publish a multi-volume account of the raids. The

project was significant in allowing survivors to recover memories of the horrific events, and stimulated others throughout the country to write histories of their own cities' destruction. In 1973, a nationwide Society for Recording Air Raids decided to build resource centres throughout Japan as a way of transmitting the experience to future generations. While some cities made progress toward realizing this goal, Tokyo's fiscal crisis prevented governor Minobe from building what came to be called the Tokyo Peace Museum.

The election of Suzuki Shun'ichi as governor in 1979 further complicated the task. Suzuki's conservative leanings and his global city vision for Tokyo did not match the evolving approach of those who continued to lobby for the Tokyo Peace Museum. The Society to Build Peace Museums, in part an outgrowth of the Society for Recording Air Raids, took the position that any museum meant to transmit the experience of air raids on Japan's cities had to be situated within a broader narrative about the war's causes and effects, and that discussion of Japan's aggression in Asia and its war responsibility must play a key role in any museum meant to promote 'peace consciousness'.



Remains of woman and infant after the March 1945 Tokyo air raid

Governor Suzuki chafed at this approach and refused to build the structure. When a coalition led by the Socialist Party assumed control of the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly in the early 1990s, it forced the governor, now in his fourth and final term, to issue a directive to proceed with the Tokyo Peace Museum. In 1993, a committee returned the design for a 5,000 square meter structure, secured a site for it near the mouth of the Sumida River, and came up with a guiding philosophy for 'Tokyo's twenty-first century symbol of peace'. While mourning the dead and conveying the experience of the air raids was its main purpose, the committee asserted it should also relate the wartime suffering Japan had caused by incorporating an exhibit on Japan's air raids on Chinese cities and creating a memorial dedicated to both Tokyo firebombing victims and 'worldwide victims of the war'.

Battles over the place of memory

Suzuki, instead of building the structure, allowed his successor to inherit the commitment. Controversy erupted when the governor's office announced that the site of the museum would be moved to Yokoami Park, and again when it was declared that the museum would be built *underground* to preserve an early Showa era structure housing exhibits from the 1923 earthquake. Many protested that building the peace museum in Yokoami Park and anchoring Tokyo air raid mem-

ories there would infringe on its role as a commemoration space for those killed in the 1923 disaster. Others argued that placing the structure underground was not fitting for Tokyo's twenty-first century symbol of peace.

As protests against the planned construction of the peace museum in Yokoami Park continued, another form of opposition arose, this time against the contents of the proposed exhibit. Leading the charge was neo-nationalist Fujioka Nobukatsu, founder of the Advancement of a Liberal View of History Study Group, whose purpose was to combat the 'masochistic historical perspective' of school textbooks that included mention of Japanese atrocities committed in Asia. Fujioka also took a strong position against the conciliatory messages of Japan's peace museums. To prevent the Tokyo Peace Museum from being built, he formed the oddly-named Citizens Concerned about Peace in Tokyo, organized protests in Yokoami Park, and wrote many opinion pieces attacking the exhibit proposals.

Exhibits that mentioned such things as Japanese air raids in China, Fujioka argued, would lead visitors to conclude that the Tokyo air raids directly resulted from Japan's activities in Asia, and would accordingly 'trample on the hearts of children and exert mind control over them'. Tokyo, Fujioka insisted, should build a memorial to the air raid victims without delay; the museum could wait until a consensus had been reached on what ought to be included in the exhibits.

In 1999, Fujioka's protests and his alliance with a local politician resulted in a Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly decision to prohibit the construction of the museum and to have the monument built in Yokoami Park. Contrary to the original plan, the monument was not to mention 'worldwide victims of the war', but refer only to the air raid victims, mourning, and peace.

In March 2001, Governor Ishihara Shintarō presided over the dedication of the 'Dwelling of Remembrance' monument, which eerily resembles the air raid shelters that dotted Tokyo during the war. Some bereaved relatives were consoled that, after more than half a century, Tokyo had publicly remembered those who died in the fire bombings. Other air raid survivors were less impressed, charging that it can never achieve the goals assigned it. The monument, they argued, because it was built in Yokoami Park and without the peace museum, can never adequately pay tribute to the dead or promote the pursuit of peace. Given the ongoing controversies over the appropriate place to situate the Tokyo air raids, both in the city's landscape and that of Japan's war memory, we may recall a line from Robert Lowell's poem 'For the Union Dead':

*Their monument sticks like
a fishbone
in the city's throat*

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