

**Peacebuilding through the Story of Reconciliation**  
**United Kingdom, Japan**  
**International Christian University**  
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*Summary*

My project aimed to contribute to peacebuilding between Japan and the U.K. by passing on to the young generation in Japan the history of POWs and their testimonies of reconciliation. I interviewed the families of POWs in the U.K., taught history in high school in Japan, and finally hosted a lecture at my university to share what I learned throughout my project and encourage students to work for peace and reconciliation.

*Project Description*

I decided to implement this project after getting to know Keiko Holmes, who works for reconciliation between former British POWs and Japanese. I learned that many Western soldiers were interned by the Japanese Army during World War II. I also came to realize that they have had bitterness and anger toward Japan for many years after experiencing atrocities of the Army and harsh living conditions at the camps. Since people in Japan barely have an opportunity to learn about POWs, I aspired to visit England to interview them and share what I learned in this project with young students in Japan.

In the beginning, I had an opportunity to teach POWs history and talk about Keiko Holmes' reconciliation ministry in the Bible classes at ICU High School, Tokyo. Most students did not learn about it at school before. It gave them a chance to see World War II history from a different perspective and know how forgiving enemies brought healing to the former POWs. This opportunity encouraged me to research this matter more and promote peace education in Japanese schools.

I stayed in the U.K. for a month during my summer break to carry out my project. To begin with, I attended the Summer Reunion in London, a gathering of POWs' families and Japanese people. This event was hosted by the Japanese Embassy and Keiko's charitable organization, Agape World. About 190 people joined the event, and I got to speak with many families and researchers of POWs and civilian internees. People from Agape World provided me with places to stay and helped me connect with many POW families.

I interviewed more than twenty people from all over the U.K. Most interviewees were the second generation of former British POWs and civilian internees. I also spoke to a researcher of women internees as well as people from Agape World. The POWs and internees' families shared their father's experiences in the Japanese camps. Some of them met Keiko long after the war and joined the reconciliation pilgrimage to Japan with her. As they visited places such as the British POWs' graves and had a reconciliation service during their journey to Japan, they started to set free from their pains and reconciled with Japanese people. Each interviewees had a different, unique, and moving testimony of reconciliation. Their letters, photos, and books with their personal stories were helpful to deepen my understanding of this complicated history. Although their experiences at the camps were shocking to hear, they taught me the power of apology and forgiveness, which freed them from the past.

One lady I interviewed is the daughter of a former POW, Ron Upton. He was forced to engage in constructing the Burma Railway at the age of 21. He suffered from malaria, starvation, abuse, and the death of friends during his internment. Since his bitterness and anger toward Japanese people was strong, it took him four years to talk to a Japanese person, Keiko, and share his experience with her. After being invited to the reconciliation pilgrimage by Keiko, he battled with the feeling of betrayal toward

his fellow soldiers. However, he wanted to be free from bitterness and finally decided to visit Japan. When Ron stayed with a host family in Japan, a young Japanese boy said to him, "I am sorry." It was all it took to heal his heart. This simple yet sincere apology was what he wanted for many years. Ron also met a former Japanese soldier, Hiroshi Abe, who was the commanding officer in his camp. Hiroshi apologized to British POW families. After battling his mixed feelings, Ron forgave Hiroshi and reconciled with his former enemy. Ron's daughter shared that he was still a prisoner captured by his hatred and anger until this reconciliation. He experienced true liberation the moment he chose to forgive.

From my interviews, I learned that reconciliation is a long process and requires humility, openness, and willingness to change. One of my interviewees told me, "Reconciliation is not only meeting in the middle of a bridge but going together to both sides to see the other's point of view." By joining the pilgrimage to Japan, POWs learned that Japanese people also experienced the horrible war, and their negative view toward Japanese was removed. It is significant to understand what the other person has experienced and be compassionate to each other.

Keiko Holmes describes reconciliation as the deliverance of both sides from bitterness or remorse. There is healing and liberation not only to victims but also to the one who apologizes. I observed her reconciliation ministry and how she interacted with the POW families. The first thing she did was simply just build friendships with them. She showed compassion and understanding toward those who were hurt by listening to them. Her motivation is her faith in God, who wants to heal people's hearts. Furthermore, she continually keeps in touch with people who joined the reconciliation pilgrimage and hosted various events for reunion. She has also visited many countries in Southeast Asia, Australia, and the U.S., where she apologized to the people who were hurt by the Japanese Army. Although it requires true humility and a great deal of courage, her work began to build peace between Japan and other countries.

After returning to Japan, I hosted an event at our university, ICU, where I gave a presentation, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Testimonies of POWs' Healing and Deliverance." Many students and professors attended the event, and a lot of them became interested in learning more about this matter and working for reconciliation. Some of them started joining the book club at ICU, where we read a book, "Reconciling All Things," and discussed reconciliation together. I heard from a few students that my presentation encouraged them to bring reconciliation to people around them or to forgive others.

Some changes have been made in the process of implementing the project. I got to learn about not only POWs but also civilian internees, including women and children. Unfortunately, I was not able to interview Japanese people who reconciled with POWs since some of them already passed away, and it was not possible to find contacts of their families. However, I had a chance to speak with Japanese people involved in Agape's ministry. They shared their experience when they visited many countries in Asia with Keiko and apologized to people on behalf of Japan. In the end, my research interests expanded more than I imagined and broadened my perspective.

For future activities, I would like to continue this work by sharing what I learned from my peace project and inviting other young students to join this work. Specifically, I will start a group with other students to research history and reconciliation together and host workshops inside/outside of our university. I will also continue supporting the book club at ICU and go on a field trip at the war museum to learn more about history in Japan and peacebuilding. Furthermore, I will invite Keiko Holmes and people from Agape World to ICU and our church in Tokyo to speak about their reconciliation work. I would like to keep in touch with the families of POWs and Agape World to continually build friendships and work toward reconciliation together.

### *Reflection*

I define peace as the absence of bitterness and the presence of forgiveness. Healing of one's heart and liberation from the past only comes from reconciliation with a former enemy. A sincere apology cannot be replaced with money because people's hearts can be changed only by hearts. I believe that reconciliation can bring sustainable peace between people.

This project contributed to peace by passing the testimonies of POWs' reconciliation to the young generation. Since hatred often can be passed on through generations, reconciliation must be passed on to the next generation to come. In my presentation, many students were struck to know history for the first time but found hope in reconciliation at the same time. Each student thought about the responsibility they hold and how they could contribute to reconciliation. It is essential to know the history, learn from it, and seek to build better relationships with other countries.

When I contacted people to interview in England, I heard that some people still do not want to speak with Japanese people, and in fact, hatred is getting stronger in the second generation of POWs. Reconciliation is still needed especially between second and third generations.

This project challenged me to think about my responsibility as a young Japanese adult. I encountered the words, "If there is something broken in the house where you were born, you who live in that house now will need to fix it." Some people might think that the young generation has nothing to do with what the older generation did in the past. However, the past cannot be erased, and the existing generation is the only people who can fix the past and cultivate better relationships with other countries. I think that ignorance and indifference can deepen wounds. As a young Japanese student, I would like to respond to this issue and bring healing to those who are hurt.

I will continue telling the stories by bringing hope to the young generation in Japan. We do not have to be ashamed or condemned by the past. Instead, we can find that there is hope in reconciliation when people apologize and forgive with a sincere heart. We are given the opportunity to take on the mission for reconciliation, which will lead to long-lasting peace.

#### *Personal Statement*

Eimi Miyake: Reconciliation gives the young generation a chance to recover from the past and hope for a better future. All we need is humility, openness, and willingness to change.