

**Peacebuilding through the Story of Reconciliation
England, Japan
International Christian University
Eimi Miyake**

Issue

During WWII, 140,000 soldiers from Western countries such as Britain and the US were captives in Japan. POWs worked under severe working conditions and suffered from hunger and abuse by Japanese soldiers. 27% of them lost their lives due to malnutrition or violence, and survivors have suffered from their physical and mental pain for many years after their return from war. Their hatred and anger toward the Japanese Army grew, and the scars in their hearts were not easily healed.

A Japanese Christian woman named Keiko Homes connected such former British POWs and former Japanese soldiers and brought about reconciliation between them. The first reconciliation journey started in 1992, leading 26 retired British soldiers to Japan. The charitable organization Agape World that Keiko Homes founded has achieved to bring over five hundred people to the Agape Pilgrimage of Reconciliation. Through their numerous efforts, the Japanese met their former enemies and apologized, and were forgiven. British soldiers were set free from the anger and hatred toward the Japanese that they had had for many years. Likewise, the Japanese were freed from shame and remorse.

Moreover, Keiko Homes and Agape World have visited many places in Asia to meet and apologize to people who experienced WWII. Reconciliation and healing have been realized in many parts of the world. Although WWII is a huge topic we discuss at school in Japan, the reality and cruelty of POWs are rarely taught. I have realized that we learn a lot about how Japan was damaged, especially by the atomic bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and yet we do not know the damage and pain Japan caused to other countries. As a young Japanese adult, I believe that the younger generation in Japan needs to know the history of POWs during WWII and learn it more objectively. I also think that the work of reconciliation by Keiko Homes and Agape World should be recognized more widely by young Japanese people.

I regard peace not only as external but also as internal and emotional. Even if conflict ends, there is no peace when tension and anger still separate people. It leaves pain in people's hearts which could pass on to generations and has the possibility of causing a new conflict. I define peace as the presence of forgiveness and the absence of hatred. Reconciliation plays an important role in achieving sustainable peace. Forgiveness brings healing to both sides of the conflict. In this project, I would like to contribute to peacebuilding between future Japan and its former enemies by passing on the stories of POWs and their reconciliation to young Japanese people.

Plan

1. Know the stories

I would like to begin by visiting the former British soldiers or their families who Keiko Homes and Agape World have reached out to. I will interview them to hear the stories of POWs in Japan and the difficulties and struggles they had during and after WWII. I will also research the process of reconciliation by asking them the following questions:

- what made them decide to go to Japan and forgive people who hurt them
- how they felt before and after the reconciliation / any changes in their hearts
- what made the reconciliation between former enemies possible ...etc

Next, I will interview Keiko Homes and people who have worked in Agape World to learn more about the journeys of reconciliation. In particular, I would like to know their struggles in the process of journeys and how they have overcome and achieved reconciliation. Also, I will visit Japanese people who apologized to British veterans or their families. I am interested in hearing how they received forgiveness and how it changed their hearts.

2. Share the stories

Based on the stories I heard from the British, Japanese, and people who worked together to succeed in reconciliation, I would like to share what I learned with the young generation in Japan by the following methods:

- create a video of interviews and research about POWs
- organize an event to show the video and present my research in my fieldwork at International Christian University
 - invite university students to the workshop and discuss what our generation can do for peacebuilding
- if possible, visit other universities and high schools to host workshops

Objectives

- Share the work of Keiko Homes and Agape World with young people in Japan
- Raise awareness of the history of POWs during WWII and the significance of reconciliation and forgiveness
- Discuss how our generation can contribute to peace in the future

Significance of this project

Knowing the history and how war causes pain physically and mentally to soldiers gives people a chance to think about how they can avoid mistakes and wrong choices in the future. Reconciliation and forgiveness can be passed on to the next generation, which can contribute to long-lasting peace over generations.

Alternative plan

If the plan to visit British families needs to be canceled, I would like to visit places in Asia where Keiko Homes and her organization went to apologize to people who suffered from war experiences. I want to visit the small church in the Philippines, which is a few kilometers away from Manila. It would be a great opportunity to hear how they felt when Keiko and her team came and how forgiveness changed the relationship between the two.

Anticipated results

Young students in Japan will have the opportunity to know the history from other countries' points of view. They will also learn the process of reconciliation and forgiveness achieved by people who earnestly hoped for peace between Japan and Britain. I hope that this project will open young people's eyes to the pains of countless people from war and encourage them to take action to continue the effort for future peace.