

Christopher Driver on  
the forgotten victims  
at Hiroshima

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# Fallen out

WHO is worse off than a  
Japanese atomic bomb  
victim?

Simple: a Korean atomic  
bomb victim.

But the atomic bomb was  
never dropped on Korea?

No, but it was dropped on  
about 100,000 Koreans in Hi-  
roshima and Nagasaki, on  
August 6th and 9th, 1945.

What were they doing  
there? What happened to  
them?

They were slave labourers.  
Most of them died, of course.  
The others improvised.  
Chang Youngkeun, for  
instance:

"At the Minamy uniform  
factory in Hiroshima we  
were used as helpers and  
cleaners, doing all the odd  
jobs. That day I was taking  
some cargo in a horse-drawn  
cart. When I had gone only  
a few hundred metres from  
the factory, while I was  
tightening the cargo from  
the rear, I saw sudden light-  
ning and passed out. Some  
time later, I crawled out  
from underneath the cart to  
see the horse standing still,  
profusely bleeding, with his  
eyes closed tight. Soon the  
horse collapsed and died. I  
was all right except for  
slight bleeding from my  
head. Perhaps the cargo pro-  
tected me from the first  
rush of the heat wave.

"When I came back to the  
factory, 33 of the 53 of us  
who came together from  
Korea were still alive. What-  
ever medicine was available  
went to the Japanese first,  
and there was nothing for  
Koreans. I used Korean folk  
medicine that I had seen  
used in my village. I some-  
how secured a sack of pota-  
toes and then grated the raw  
potatoes, which I applied to  
the burns and other external  
wounds. The surviving 33 of  
us returned to Korea during  
the last week of September."

The bright ideas depart-  
ment of British civil defence  
had better make a note of  
the grated potato cure.  
Koreans are famously tough,  
but 100 per cent successful  
short-term first aid sounds  
uncommonly good in the cir-  
cumstances. The long-term,  
though, was not open to such  
remedies.

"Chu Myongsoon has been  
lying in a dark attic room  
for the past 30 years. She is  
unable to bear any light, not  
even that of a candle. On  
August 9, 1945, she was two  
years old. Carried on her  
mother's back, she was near  
the Nagasaki train station  
when the flash and blast lev-  
elled everything around her."

Kai Hong, a young US-edu-  
cated teacher of philosophy  
and logic from Korea, quotes  
these accounts in the Sha-  
vian-style political commen-  
tary he attaches to his first  
play, *Hibakusha* (atomic  
bomb victim) which different  
theatre groups are to per-  
form this month in Tokyo,  
Budapest and Edinburgh  
(the Cambridge Mummies).  
The episodes — which the  
Cambridge English don Tim  
Cribb describes as Brecht-by-  
accident — describe a year  
in the death of a Korean  
*hibakusha* family.

The existence of the text,  
scribbled mostly in tolerant  
progressive cafes in Budapest  
and Berkeley, and hilariously  
ill-printed by the Interna-  
tional Youth Theatre Centre  
in Tokyo, is a tribute to the  
persuasive tenacity of its au-  
thor, who sat on the grass in  
St James's Square under the  
blank stare of the Libyan  
Embassy, and talked.

Not of past events — "It's  
a Western illusion that  
you've understood Hiroshima  
when you've discovered and  
described exactly what hap-  
pened" — but of present ex-  
planations: the history of  
Japanese racism towards  
other Asians, especially their  
Korean lookalikes; the "ex-  
pansionist logic" behind the  
nuclear arms race.

Hiroshima, and for that  
matter the Korean war, are  
events before Kai was born.  
(His father was a Segul  
brewer.) Only in 1961 did he  
learn of his country's willy-  
nilly involvement in Japan's  
cataclysm, and of the esti-  
mated 18,000 *hibakushas* still  
living in present-day, indus-  
trialised Korea, many of them  
still ignorant of what is  
wrong with them and with  
the deformed children the  
women bear.

Not many people in the  
world are interested in them,  
least of all their own busi-  
nessmen's government, which  
accepted a covert \$300 mil-  
lion reparations payment  
from Japan for the fate of  
the three million Korean  
slave labourers and prosti-  
tutes conscripted during the  
war, and spent the money  
elsewhere.

It is not only in distance  
that the East is far: suppose  
that primitive little nuclear  
bomblet had been dropped  
on Hamburg, not Hiroshima,  
and that 18,000 Dutch or Pol-  
ish survivors of a slave la-  
bour force there were now  
living in Amsterdam or War-  
saw: would anybody need to  
discover them and write a  
play? Least of all a  
Chomskyite intellectual  
trained in Princeton, like  
Kai. But the history of the  
world fell out differently,  
and left him — when he is  
not teaching formal logic to  
computer programmers in  
Wagner College, New York  
— searching for his own  
people's damaged roots. "All  
philosophy ends in political  
philosophy," he said.