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Conflict, Collaboration and Diplomacy: American and Japanese Scientific Investigation of Nuclear Survivors in the 1950s

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After the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese and American scientists investigated a variety of aspects of the bomb's effects. That became part of US–Japan diplomacy. How did the scientists of both countries clash and collaborate? This paper addresses the momentum of their research activity amid the struggles of the 1950s.

During the occupation era (1945–1952), the United States established the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC) to study the long-term effects of atomic bomb on human body and required the Japanese scientists to collaborate. It is said that the American scientists stole medical data from Japanese side and published it in scientific journals in their own names. However, the situation changed after the U.S. occupation ended in 1952. The Japanese press began to criticize the ABCC for neglecting to provide medical treatment while collecting survivors' data. The conflict between Japanese and American scientists also surfaced when Japanese fishermen exposed radiation fallout from the U.S. hydrogen bomb test in Bikini Atoll in 1954. At that moment, the ABCC offered medical treatment to the fishermen, but the Japanese team refused it. A kind of “cold war” broke out between the American and Japanese scientists. The bitter experience of the early to mid 1950s drove the ABCC to reassess their strategy in order to continue the investigation in Japan.

The diplomatic aspects of the ABCC have been analyzed by scholars such as John Beatty and Susan Lindee. By recognizing ABCC as the “diplomatic front” in Japan, Beatty argues that formalizing more “collaborative” arrangements in the 1950s was largely motivated by diplomatic aims (“Scientific Collaboration, Internationalism, and Diplomacy: The Case of the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 26 (1993), 205–231). Upon previous studies in the US, this paper analyses how American and Japanese scientific collaboration developed in the 1950s by using both Japanese and American materials. The official documents and letters between American scientists of the ABCC and AEC (the funding source of ABCC) and Japanese leading scientists such as Masao Tsuzuki will show us how the Americans incorporated the Japanese in their initiatives, the motivations for their collaboration, and how it ultimately bonded the two countries.