

# Prayers for Peace Embodied in Origami Cranes

Hiroshima City in Hiroshima Prefecture is the place where, on August 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb in human history was dropped, leading to the loss of many lives. In the park near the hypocenter, there is a statue of a girl holding an origami crane<sup>1</sup>. Here, we introduce the story behind this iconic monument. (Text: Tanaka Nozomi)

The statue of the girl holding an origami crane is called the Children's Peace Monument. At the foot of the statue, there are rows of display booths containing numerous *senbazuru*<sup>2</sup>, bundles of folded paper cranes offered as prayers or wishes. Nakanishi Rie from the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum talked about the background of the statue's establishment.

"The creation of the Children's Peace Monument was inspired by a girl named Sasaki Sadako. Ten years after her exposure to the atomic bombing, Sadako developed leukemia in the sixth grade of elementary school. While praying for her recovery, she continued folding origami cranes on her sickbed until her passing," explains Nakanishi.

For the Japanese, the crane symbolizes longevity and good fortune, and it has also been a symbol of heartfelt wishes, such as the fulfillment of desires and recovery from illness, often expressed through *senbazuru*.

"Classmates deeply affected by Sadako's death initiated a nationwide fundraising campaign to establish a memorial for her and other children who perished in the atomic bombing. Three years after Sadako's passing, in 1958, a statue was installed in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park," says Nakanishi.

After the statue was erected, Sadako Sasaki's poignant tale and her origami cranes became the inspiration for numerous books and films. The global dissemination of her story began with the 1977 pub-



The Children's Peace Monument erected in Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park



Photo: Donated by Sasaki Shigeo and Sasaki Masahiro  
Collection of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

Origami cranes folded by Sadako, including some that remain unfinished.



Photo: Donated by Umeda Yoriko  
Collection of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

Origami cranes folded by Sadako from medicine wrapping paper—a gift for a classmate who came to visit her in the hospital.



Photo: Donated by Okura Kiyo  
Collection of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum

The filmscript of the movie “Senbazuru,” which was produced around the time the monument was created.



Photo: PIXTA



Display booths at the foot of the Children's Peace Monument showcase bundles of *senbazuru*, with additional artworks inspired by origami cranes.



Photo: PIXTA

*Senbazuru* offerings.

lication of “Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes” by Eleanor Coerr in the United States. Coerr, a correspondent for a Canadian newspaper in Japan at the time, brought this touching narrative to the world. In the 1990s, an illustrated book titled “Sadako,” based on Coerr’s work, was published in the United States and later adapted into a musical for the stage. The story also found its way into school lessons, and to this day, it continues to be shared and remembered globally in various forms.

The Children’s Peace Monument is also known as the “Tower of a Thousand Cranes” due to the many offerings of *senbazuru* throughout the year. As Sadako’s origami cranes became regarded as a symbol of peace, many people came to sympathize and began to dedicate origami cranes to the Monument. Even today, approximately 10 million paper cranes, about 10 tons, arrive from around the world each year.

In recent years, the City of Hiroshima has initiated efforts to make use of the paper cranes received from around the world. Rather than preserving them as

they are, the City of Hiroshima actively launched the Paper Crane Recycling and Circulation Project in 2012, aiming to channel the thoughts and feelings embodied by paper cranes into new forms and share them with others. For instance, the paper recycled from the paper cranes is utilized in events such as a lantern floating ceremony held on August 6, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Day.

The sentiments embodied in the paper cranes sympathize not only within the hearts of the Japanese but also echo across the globe, expanding into new realms. “When you visit Japan, I encourage you to come to Hiroshima and see firsthand the numerous *senbazuru* received from around the world and experience the heartfelt wishes for peace,” Nakanishi suggests. **7**

1. Origami is the art of creating various works by folding a single square sheet of paper without cutting. This example refers to origami folded into the form of a crane. It is one of the most common origami creations in Japan.  
2. *Senbazuru* (literally “1,000 cranes”) refers to a collection of origami cranes connected with strings into a bundle. It is believed that by gathering many of these cranes, considered as symbols of good luck, especially 1,000, one’s wishes are more likely to come true. People create these bundles while expressing wishes for longevity, success, healing from illness, and more.