

The 2005 World War II Essay Contest

Second Place

The Nanjing Massacre and the Legacy of Mistrust and Animosity

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There has been, and still is, a strong and deep-rooted sense of mutual animosity and mistrust between the Chinese and Japanese peoples. As Akira Iriye puts it, “although there has developed a kind of commonality, interdependence, mutual respect, and attraction between them, there simultaneously coexists an emotional sense of disparity, autonomy, repulsion, and condescension between them”.¹ This has been especially true since the 1920s and 1930s, and even more so since the Rape of Nanjing. These feelings of “disparity, repulsion, autonomy, and condescension” that Mr. Iriye speaks of do not stem primarily from the massacre itself, but from how Japan and its leading officials have dealt with it since the end of World War II. Until Japan can accept full responsibility for the actions of its predecessors regarding the Rape of Nanjing (and this entails more than a simple confession by Japan), this “mistrust and animosity” will continue to permeate Sino-Japanese relations for many years to come.

Full-scale war broke out in China on 7 July 1937 with the Japanese attack on the Marco Polo Bridge and the occupation of Beijing and Tianjin. By September 1937, the main theatre of war became the delta of the Yangtze River. Shanghai, still only partly occupied by the Japanese, was the largest port in East Asia, and the most important economic and transportation center in China. The city of Nanjing, around 200 miles up the river, was the capital of the Chinese Republic. From the military point of view, the delta was crucial because the bulk of the Chinese armed forces were gathered there. Only limited holding forces faced the Japanese in the north and minimal forces remained in the south. The Japanese strategy was to secure the delta

¹ Akira Iriye, ed., The Chinese and Japanese: Essays in Political and Cultural Interaction (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 3.

by the capture of Shanghai and Nanjing and defeat the capacity of the Chinese to resist.²

On December 13, 1937, after three months of hard fighting the Japanese troops captured Nanjing. For the following six weeks until early February of 1938, Japanese soldiers committed what has been called the single greatest atrocity of the twentieth century. Following *Sanko Seisaku* (kill-all, burn-all, destroy-all) an estimated 300,000 Chinese civilians and POWs were systematically killed and another 20,000-30,000 women were raped. The sheer barbarity and cruelty with which the Japanese troops murdered, raped, and pillaged was unimaginable. Innocent Chinese civilians (men, women, and children included), Chinese POWs, and those suspected of being Chinese soldiers hiding amongst the Chinese general public, were subjected to horrific acts of terror and murder at the hands of Japanese soldiers. People were buried alive, babies were bayoneted, and contests were held between Japanese soldiers to kill the most Chinese. A report written by Japanese correspondents Asami, Mitsumoto, and Yasuda confirmed the actuality of these killing contests. One Second Lieutenant is quoted as saying, "With things going like this, I'll probably cut down a hundred by the time we reach Danyang, never mind Nanjing. You're going to lose. My sword has killed fifty-five and it's only got one little nick in it".³ Another Second Lieutenant responded, "Neither of us is killing people who run away. Since I'm serving as a _____ (word omitted), I'm not winning any points, but by the time we're in Danyang, I'll show you what kind of record I can rack up".⁴ In addition to these killing contests and other atrocities, the Japanese machine-gunned thousands at a time and threw their bodies into the Yangtze River, other streams and ponds, and homes were plundered and often burned to the ground just to provide the Japanese troops with a few hours of warmth.

The taking of Nanjing created a gigantic psychological wound on the survivors of the massacre. Many of the survivors interviewed by Zhang Lianhong said that "during daylight hours, people all gathered on the streets. There was safety in numbers. Only after dark did they dare go back to their homes to sleep. Only old women dared to appear on the streets." The Chinese people living in Nanjing during the massacre lived in a tremendous amount of fear and stress.⁵

² Kevin Baker, "The Rape of Nanjing", *Contemporary Review* 267, no. 1556 (1995): 2.

³ Honda Katsuichi, *The Nanjing Massacre: A Japanese Journalist Confronts Japan's National Shame*, ed. Frank Gibney, trans. Karen Sandness (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1999), 125.

⁴ Katsuichi, 125.

⁵ Zhang Lianhong, "The Nanjing Massacre: The Socio-Psychological Effects", *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (2000): 6.

Six weeks of unrelenting Japanese brutality also had a tremendous impact on the family social structure of the Chinese living in Nanjing. A survey taken by Professor Lewis S.C. Smythe in 1938 stated that 11.7 percent of the remaining families in Nanjing could have been considered incomplete households. Of these, twenty-six percent were headed by women, and in the safety zones, the numbers were much higher, reaching thirty-five percent. Smythe's survey also pointed out that only nine percent of the people in Nanjing were employed in March of 1938. His report also concluded that over ninety-four percent of Nanjing's citizens were "inadequately provided for after the "pacification" of Nanjing."⁶

During the Japanese occupation of Nanjing, brothels and opium houses, which the Nationalist government tried to eradicate prior to the war, were promoted and encouraged by the Japanese on a large scale. More than forty comfort stations were established in and around the city of Nanjing. For a country "with a strong emphasis on traditional morality with regard to sexual behavior, to have this open display of sexuality was extremely disturbing and damaging to the moral well-being of the people."⁷ Surpassing the spread of brothels, opium houses numbered around 175 in Nanjing, and there were an additional thirty stores just for selling opium. Conservative estimates of opium addicts in the city was 50,000 people, nearly one-eighth of Nanjing's total population.

Shortly after Japan's surrender in September of 1945, China's Nationalist government announced a policy of "return enmity with kindness", forbidding Chinese citizens from engaging in acts of retribution against the defeated Japanese.⁸ For the Chinese citizens that suffered under Japan's occupation, this meant suppressing years of fear, rage, and frustration under Japanese rule, and attempting to go about their lives as if nothing had happened. The subsequent Tokyo Trials would punish the leading members involved in the Nanjing Massacre, but the ensuing Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union would allow many of Japan's war criminals to return home with only a slap on the wrist.

In November of 1946, the International Military Tribunal in Tokyo confirmed that the Nanjing Massacre lasted for a period of at least six weeks in and around the city. The large-scale nature of the massacre was also reaffirmed, and the well-planned and resolute action followed the policy of the Japanese government. "Thus, the massacres in Nanjing were

⁶ Lianhong, 6.

⁷ Lianhong, 8.

⁸ Fei Fei Li, Robert Sabella and David Liu, eds., Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing (London, England: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2002), 186.

unquestionably true and most of the collective massacres were made under the order of high ranking commanders”.⁹ In some cases, these high-ranking officers joined the killing sprees themselves. General Matsui Iwane, as the highest ranking officer in the field at the time of the massacre, was sentenced to death. Hirota Kobi was also sentenced to death because, as a member of the Japanese Cabinet, he did not do anything to prevent the incident, “which was contrary to international laws, and “his action amounted to criminal negligence”.¹⁰ Along with Kobi and Iwane, Japan’s first batch of twenty-eight war criminals, with the exception of Emperor Hirohito and a few biological warfare criminals, were punished by the Tribunal in Tokyo. The second and third batches, however, were all released as the Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union worsened and a Communist victory in China appeared imminent.

During World War II, there was strict censorship of the press and limited free speech in Japan. For many Japanese civilians, news of the Nanjing Massacre never reached the mainland, thus many never came to remember it directly. For these Japanese people who did not learn of the massacre in Nanjing, “it became an event that lacked direct recollections and was devoid of a real sense of history”. This would become an obstacle to later Japanese understanding of the Nanjing Massacre, and would serve as the basis for the acceptance of denials that began in Tokyo under the auspices of the International Military Tribunal that tried and convicted Japanese war criminals in 1946.¹¹

The Nanjing Massacre was called a fabrication by many of the conservative leaders in Japan in and around the time of the Tokyo War Crimes Trial in 1946. The consensus among many Japanese at the time was that the massacre was fabricated by the Allied countries in order to vilify Japan during the war crimes trials in Tokyo. The Nanjing Massacre was considered American propaganda and was designed to instill a sense of guilt in Japan’s mind about their part in World War II. Japan signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty in September of 1951, and in 1952 its sovereignty was returned. Because the second and third batches of Japanese war criminals were released in 1948, many were able to regain the same positions they held in the Japanese government prior to the Japanese surrender. The people who now controlled the government in post-war Japan were essentially the same people who controlled the government

⁹ Li, Sabella, Liu, 55.

¹⁰ Arnold C. Brackman, The other Nuremberg: the untold story of the Tokyo war crimes trials (New York: Morrow, 1987), 226.

¹¹ Li, Sabella, Liu, 85.

during World War II, only now they were organized into the Liberal-Democratic Party. Thus, China endured yet another slap in the face. Some good news did come out of the trials, however. For the first time, many Japanese, who had been sheltered from the censorship of the government during the war, learned of the Nanjing Massacre, and of other Japanese atrocities committed against the Chinese during World War II.

China also played a significant part in not publicizing the wartime atrocities of Japan because it was engaged in a civil war after World War II. The civil war concluded with CCP, headed by Mao Zedong, emerging victorious. Chiang Kai-shek and his nationalist followers fled mainland China and settled in Taiwan, and both China and Taiwan now needed Japan to play off the other.¹² Therefore, China never demanded an apology or any reparations from the Japanese government. Those who suffered the holocaust of the Nanjing Massacre had to “bury their sorrow and memories in their hearts”.¹³

Japanese scholars and journalists in the 1950s and 1960s generally accepted the figures that the Chinese government had collected for the International Tribunal. In the summer of 1971, Honda Katsuichi, a correspondent from the Asahi Shimbun in Tokyo, began touring Japan and published daily reports that were printed and read in Japan. The liberal left in Japan began to realize the truth surrounding the Nanjing Massacre and Japan’s overall role as a victimizer in World War II. The Japanese government and mainstream Japanese society, though, were still firmly under the control of the conservative elements of the Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP). The LDP emphasized Japan’s role as the victim in World War II, completely ignoring Japan’s own atrocities at Nanjing and elsewhere in the war, and began to charge the United States with war crimes regarding the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In 1972, a Japanese column writer named Yamamoto Shichihei published an article denying that the Nanjing Massacre happened at all. Yamamoto went even further and denied that Japan was not only innocent of war crimes at Nanjing, but that Japan had not committed any war crimes anywhere during World War II. Mr. Shichihei’s sentiments were reiterated by Suzuki Akira, a reporter for a local broadcasting corporation, who claimed that the Nanjing Massacre was greatly exaggerated by the Chinese, the Americans, and other wartime enemies of Japan. Suzuki stated that the death tolls, as well as other statistical figures about Japanese atrocities in Nanjing, were unreliable

¹² Lianhong, 10.

¹³ Lianhong, 7.

because there were few eyewitnesses to verify them (a totally false statement). This attitude of denial and partial denial would continue into the 1980s under the LDP, and would serve to feed the animosity and distrust between China and Japan.

In the autumn of 1982, the Liberal-Democratic Party in Tokyo began to circulate its revised textbooks for primary and secondary school students. These books barred the original narration of the Nanking Massacre and changed the term “invasion of Korea and China” to “moving into Korea and China”. Naturally, this aroused powerful and angry protests from China and South Korea. Meanwhile, ex-officers of the Imperial Japanese Army continued to hold firm in their stance and maintained their complete denial of the Nanjing Massacre. The Japanese LDP continued its support of those in denial, and took an evasive and ignorant position, expressing “insincere and quasi-remorseful murmurings”.¹⁴ These second and third generations of the LDP tended to shy away from the subject of Nanjing, acting as though the actions of the previous generations had nothing to do with them. The LDP continued to insist on Japan’s role as the victim of American nuclear attacks and could not understand why China and the rest of the world could not just drop the Nanjing Massacre altogether.

In November of 1984, the diary of the deceased Lieutenant General Nakajima Kesago, who was one of the major military commanders in charge of the Nanjing Massacre, was printed. His diary presented vivid and detailed accounts of day to day atrocities that he and his troops committed. Lieutenant General Nakajima Kesago’s diary ended the Japanese method of totally denying the occurrence of the Nanjing Massacre. Japan’s conservative government quickly switched tactics and adopted a policy of partial denial which centered primarily on disputing the total number of those killed at Nanjing, and distinguishing between legal and illegal killings.

An ex-officer in the IJA during World War II, Unemoto Masami, maintained the illegal killings in the Nanjing Massacre should only be 3,000 to 6,000 victims. Masami later organized a symposium that was attended by many ex-IJA officers, and their conclusion regarding the number of illegal killings at Nanjing was slightly revised to between 3,000 and 13,000 people. In 1989, the Society of graduates of Imperial Japan’s Military Schools published a book entitled *Records of the Battle of Nanjing*. Here, the number of Chinese POWs massacred was 16,000, Chinese soldiers who died in battle numbered 30,000, civilians killed was 2,400, and 4,200 civilians were captured as laborers and later put to death. Japanese writer Idakura

¹⁴ Li, Sabella, Liu, 61.

Yauhensi put the total of those killed at Nanjing at 50,000 persons. However, he adds that only 12,000-13,000 people should be counted as illegal killings. Yauhensi's figures would suggest that Chinese POWs could be legally killed without a court martial and without considering international laws on land warfare (Fourth Hague Convention of 1907-the Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land).¹⁵ Perhaps most controversial of all is the work of Professor Hata Ikuhiko. Hata Ikuhiko's research numbered the total of illegal killings at Nanjing between 38,000 and 42,000 people. This number itself, although far short of the much higher universally agreed upon total, is not the most controversial of Professor Hata Ikuhiko's work, *The Nanking Incident: the Structure of the Massacre*. It is his classification of the atrocities that the IJA committed during the Nanjing Massacre that has caused the most unrest amongst the Chinese people. Hata, as a former IJA officer, considered that all the Chinese soldiers in Nanjing, whether "defeated, remnant soldiers", or the "plain-clothes ex-soldiers" who were caught and killed by the Japanese troops should be considered legal killings.¹⁶ All individually surrendered soldiers, and those "involving themselves in fighting as well as those plain-clothes soldiers" should be considered as quasi fighting to the death, and thus, should also be considered legal killings.¹⁷

The Japanese conservative policy of partial denial during the 1980s fueled widespread renewed interest in the Nanjing Massacre amongst the Chinese. In 1985, planning began for a Memorial Hall Commemorating the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre. Since its completion, a remembrance service is held for the victims of the massacre and the survivors every December 13th at ten o'clock. During the 1980s (particularly the late 1980s) CCTV News routinely berated Japan for its inability to face its own history, and newspaper headlines and articles denounced the rightist elements within Japan's government. Aged survivors of the Nanjing Massacre reportedly could not sleep at night when they heard that the Japanese still continued to deny the massacre. Meng Xiuying, who after being interviewed by Zhang Lianhong, begged him not to reveal her name or picture because she was afraid that the Japanese would still come to kill her.¹⁸ For the Chinese at least, the memory of the Nanjing Massacre is still very vivid, and still very much alive.

¹⁵ Brackman, 43.

¹⁶ Li, Sabella, Liu, 63.

¹⁷ Li, Sabella, Liu, 63.

¹⁸ Lianhong, 11.

The actual number of those massacred at Nanjing has been repeatedly and extensively investigated and corroborated by Chinese scholars in the PRC and Taiwan, as well as by progressive-minded Japanese historians, all of which have confirmed the death toll at Nanjing as at least over 200,000 victims, and probably 300,000 victims. Yet, with conservative, rightist rhetoric of partial denial still pouring out of Japan, especially in the face of so many living survivors of the massacre and their accounts, it is easy to see why a sense of mistrust and animosity still exists between China and Japan.

The past decade has seen a lot of progress made in Japan Clarifying the historical facts surrounding the atrocities committed by the IJA during those six weeks from December 13, 1937 to early February of 1938. Many books have been published in Japan dealing with the subject, and are often featured in the mass media. Japanese school books have also improved. The Nanjing Massacre is now featured in many social science textbooks for elementary and middle schools, and in almost all high school textbooks concerning Japanese history. Today, the majority of Japanese people acknowledge that the Nanjing Massacre happened. Unfortunately, because the Japanese lack a sense of direct memory (due in large part to the fact that seventy percent of Japan's population was born after the Second World War), those who still partially deny the massacre have considerable influence within Japanese society. A militarily and politically resurgent Japan has continued to deny its role as a victimizer and as a wager of aggressive war during World War II. Failing to do so has sent the message that Japan does not feel that its conduct toward China during World War II was wrong. Without any sentiments of regret, apology, or remorse on the part of Japan, it is easy to see why China still harbors deep feelings of mistrust and resentment toward its neighbor in East Asia. By failing to make nay heart felt and sincere formal apologies, and by refusing to make any sort reparations for the victims and their survivors of the Nanjing Massacre, Japan has not assured China, or the world, that it intends to uphold the World War II adage of , “never again”.

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