

Dr. Ying Ying Chang, invited by APHAFIC, presented her book on *The Woman Who Could Not Forget, Iris Chang Before And Beyond* “The rape of Nanking” on March 11 at 2:00pm, at the San Diego Chinese Historical Society and Museum. Around 130 people attended the lecture and book signing. This event was co-organized by APHAFIC and San Diego Historical Society and Museum with cosponsors: US China People Friendship Association, House of China, San Diego Chinese Women Association, San Diego Chinese Art and Culture Association and San Diego Chinese American Women’s League. A reception and book signing followed the talk. A video tape of Iris’ speech on In search for justice at the APHAFIC annual meeting on April 25th, 2004 was played during the book signing.

Ying Ying indicated that although Iris was a public figure, very few people really knew her personal life. Ying Ying decided to write a book on her, so others could understand her life and her passion. Another reason for writing this book is when Iris died, her son Christopher was only two years old. He will never know his mother unless Ying-Ying writes a book on her. The book was dedicated to Christopher. The third reason is there were many media reports about her life and her death of which some were not accurate. Ying-Ying wants to set the record straight about her life.

Ying Ying wants people to know who was Iris Chang, what was her family background, her cultural heritage, how she decided to become a writer, and what motivated her to write the book. I want people to know her ambition and her American Dream. She also wants people to know the reason for her suicide and whether her death could have been prevented.

Much of her talks included quotes from Ying Ying’s book.

Who Iris Chang is:

Iris Chang was born in 1968 and died in 2004. In her short 36 years, she wrote three books:

Thread of the Silkworm (1995)

The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of WWII (1997)

Chinese in America (2003)

Iris Chang was an author and historian, and she was also a human-rights activist. She was single-handedly and unflinchingly fighting for justice for those who had been otherwise forgotten by history.

Her family background, and her cultural heritage

“We usually told her over the dinner table about our parents’ stories*: How my father was orphaned at the age of nine, and, in spite of his poor family background, he was able to beat the odds, challenge his fate, and struggle through and make a name of his own by working hard. I told her about my father’s hard working ethics and his emphasis on education. We never anticipated then that those stories at the dinner table would later become the impetus for her to

write the book *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, which would become an international best seller and change the world's view of World War II forever.”

“ Iris later had no identity problems as a minority in the U.S. may be due to the fact that she had been exposed to Chinese culture in her very early years. She was aware of her roots and was proud to be a Chinese-American.”

How she decide to become a writer

‘In the conversations we had over numerous telephone calls to each other during that period of time, she disclosed her ambition that she wanted to be a famous author; a world-class, best-selling book author. She had been reading many famous well-written books and studied their writing styles carefully, the way priests scrutinized the Bible....“Books are the ultimate way for writers to reach immortality,” she would say. She wanted to be remembered after her death’

What motivated her to write the book *The Rape of Nanking*?

‘I asked her whether she really wanted to continue to write this book. She said “Yes, Mom. What I’m suffering right now is nothing compared to those victims who perished in the massacre.” She added “As a writer, I want to rescue those victims from oblivion, to give a voice to the voiceless.” ’

Her passion and her conviction and her big dream

Her passion was finding a book she liked. ‘Iris was quite sentimental and told me that life was so short. She wanted to accomplish a lot in a short time; yet she never felt she had enough of it. She said she had to seize the moment, right this second! Life would vanish one day, she said, but books and words would be left behind, just like those masterpieces of literature she was reading. She said “Words are eternal.” She told me she had to work harder to achieve everything she wanted.’

Her courage in defending her book against the unjustified attacks from Japanese right wing groups (please read her book for details)

- a) Newsweek episode
- b) The debate with the Japanese ambassador to the U.S.
- c) Japanese “academics”
- d) Japanese translation of her book

Her death: side effects of medication (SSRIs anti-depressants)

The time from Iris’ breakdown to her suicide was incredibly short, and coincided exactly with the time she started taking psychiatric drugs. And the tragic, violent way she ended her life was not

characteristic of Iris. Ying Ying, as a biochemistry scientist, believed that Iris' suicide was very likely triggered by the medications she took.

Conclusions

It is not how she died, but how she lived. In her 36 years, she inspired many, many people globally with her noble spirit — her passion, dedication, sincerity, and determination — in preserving historical truth and in seeking justice. Iris said, “words are eternal” and “books are the ultimate way for writers to reach immortality.” Her books, especially the Nanking book, are a major part of her legacy.

... “People die twice - once as mortals, and once in memory. I weep when stories are lost.”She used to say, “The spoken word vanished with the wind. Likewise, the unrecorded life disappears as if it never existed.”

As to Iris’ son, Christopher who was 2 years old in 2004, ‘*...I want to teach Christopher that it is far better to belong the critical minority than the unquestioning majority. I want to teach him the ability to think independently, to evaluate ideas and information on his Own...These qualities are not universally popular in our society. My tendency to stand alone, apart from the crowd, has caused me great pain and suffering throughout my life, but in the end, I am a stronger and better person because of it.*’

Iris was a person who lived her life by her credo: The Power of One. One person can make an enormous difference in the world. One person — actually, one idea — can start a war or end one, or subvert an entire power structure. You are one individual and can change millions of lives. Think big. Do not limit your vision and do not ever compromise your dreams or ideals. Iris stood by this credo all her life and this was her belief. This spirit of hers inspired me and it was the major driving force in finishing my book. I hope this spirit of hers will inspire others as well.



Welcome dinner for Ying Ying Chang with APHFIC board members (absent is Alex Chung and Lilin Wang) at China Max restaurant



Appreciation to all co-sponsors



Book signing.... (provided by Daming Lee, World Journal)

Future event of APHAFIC

APHAFIC annual meeting on May 19th, at China Max from 6-9pm with guest speaker professor Ling-chi Wang on 'Memory, History and Redressing an Injustice: Personal and Political Engagement'. For updated information, please visit APHAFIC.org