

APHAFIC summer meeting: Courage of women

APHAFIC held its 2014 summer meeting at Chuang Archive and Learning Center , San Diego Chinese Historical Museum, 541 B Second Ave, San Diego 92101, from 2:05pm – 4pm, August 17, 20. A total of 40 people attended. This meeting featured an invited talk on "MINNIE VAUTRIN (1886-1941): THE AMERICAN 'GODDESS OF MERCY' AT THE RAPE OF NANKING" by Dr. Hua-Ling Hu with the Minnie Vautrin documentary produced by Shandong TV and Motions Pictures. This meeting was co-organized with San Diego Chinese Historical museum, with Co-sponsors: US China Peoples Friendship Association (USCPFA), San Diego Chinese American Women's League (SDCAWL), SD Chinese Art and Cultural Society (SDCACS), San Diego Chinese American Association (SDCCA) and House of China (HOC).

Dr. Hu thanked the sponsors and the audience. Her talk was followed by a documentary on Minnie Vautrin produced by Shandong TV and Motion Pictures (Vol. 13, *Unnecessarily Judgments*, which is the collective English title for twenty some volumes of documentaries on the Japanese aggression against China produced by Shandong.)

I. Hua-ling Hu's Talk:

Minnie Vautrin was born in a small village of Secor, Illinois, on September 27,1886. Her father, an immigrant from Loraine, France, operated a blacksmith shop in the village and cultivated a small farm to supplement the family income. Vautrin learned hard work as a child. She dreamed of becoming a teacher and seeing the outside world. But, she realized that her father could not afford her schooling. If she wanted to be educated she must make her own way. And she did.

In 1912, she earned a B.S. degree with high honors from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. While at the university, she became very much interested in foreign missions. In order to fulfill her childhood dreams, she joined the Foreign Missionary Society immediately after graduation. The Society sent her to Hofei, China. At Hofei, she established a girls middle school and the school under her administration became well-known. Seven years later, in 1919, after receiving a M. A. degree in education from Columbia during her first furlough home from China, she became the acting president of Ginling College for Women in Nanking. At Ginling, she was determined to promoting Chinese women's education and helping the poor. She encouraged her students to help the poor people in Ginling's neighborhood. She and her students established free clinic for the poor and free elementary school to teach their boys and girls.

In July1937, the Japanese army launched a full-scale war against China. In November of that year, after occupying Shanghai, the army immediately marched towards Nanking and intensified aerial bombing of the city. In Nanking, the rich, middle class, and foreigners all left. Only the poor could not afford to leave. Vautrin repeatedly defied American Embassy's order to evacuate. She wanted to remain in Nanking and help the poor. Meantime, twenty some Western gentlemen decided to remain in the city and establish a safety zone with twenty some refugee camps to protect and receive innocent civilians. At Vautrin's request, Ginling became the special camp for women and children.

On December 13,1937, the Japanese army occupied Nanking. The soldiers immediately went on a rampage of killing, looting, burning, and raping. They not only raped and gang raped Chinese women but also tortured the victims to death. Thousands of women poured into Ginling and soon the campus was

overcrowded with refugees. Vautrin had to stand at the front gate to urge the old women to return home and leave room for Ginling to protect the younger ones. But, most of them refused to leave. They knelt on the ground, tearfully begging for being admitted into the campus. Seeing the sad scene, Vautrin let all of them in.

For day and night, Vautrin protected women and children from the Japanese soldiers. Some of the soldiers became angry at her. They slapped her face and threatened her life with their guns. One night they even demanded her to leave the campus. She refused to leave, saying "This is my home. I cannot leave."

She not only protect women refugees but also cared for their well-beings. For instance, she obtained milk powder to feed their babies. She tried every possible way to find their missing husbands and sons who were the sole bread winners of their families. The grateful refugees called her their "Goddess of Mercy".

During this period of time, she kept a diary (August 12, 1937 to April 14, 1940). The original motive for starting a diary was that with the extra work involved in preparing for the forthcoming war made it impossible for her to inform Ginling people and missionary officials by writing individual letters. She resorted to the dairy form. Then, later, when she saw the Japanese soldiers commit despicable crimes, she was determined to record her diary day by day no matter how exhausted she was. She wanted to leave an eyewitness account and let the outside world know what actually happened in desecrated Nanking. Nevertheless, she was in constant fear that the her diary would be confiscated by the Japanese soldiers if they discovered it. So, whenever the soldiers barged into the campus, she always hid her diary in one after another secret place.

In May 1940, Vautrin suffered a nervous breakdown and had to return to the states for medical treatment. At that time, mental illness was considered a stigma in the society. Her colleagues kept a tight lip on what happened to her and few people knew her whereabouts. One year later, she committed suicide by turning on the gas jet in her friend's kitchen. She left a note, saying that she could not believe that she would ever recover, she rather die than become insane. She concluded that her life as a failure. It was said that shortly before her death, she repeatedly told her friends that if she could live twice, she would still serve the Chinese people. China was her home.

II. Presentation of the Vautrin Documentary:

The Vautrin documentary starts with her committing suicide in Indiana on May 14, 1941 and being buried by her brother at Shepherd, Michigan. At the time, few people in the U.S. knew her. But her death had far greater impact in China. Ginling College erected a tombstone engraved with the "Goddess of Mercy" for her in the vicinity of Nanking. The Chinese Nationalist government, at its temporary site in Southwest China, issued a proclamation to commemorate her. The government had bestowed upon her the Order of the Jade in July 1938 to thank her for protecting the Chinese women and children.

Minnie Vautrin, Chinese name Hua Chuan, went to China in 1912. She taught school at Hofei and then Ginling College in Nanking (1919-1940). On the eve of Japanese occupation of Nanking, Vautrin remained in Nanking to help the poor. Meantime, some twenty Western gentlemen organized the International Committee of the Nanking Safety Zone. They elected John Rabe as the head of the Committee and established twenty some camps to receive refugees with Ginling College as the camp for women and children. At its peak, the number of refugees at Ginling reached over 10, 000.

Vautrin kept a diary during the Rape of Nanking. In order to leave an eyewitness account of Japanese soldiers' atrocities, Vautrin recorded what saw and heard in Nanking day by day. But, her diary began to skip weeks in spring of 1940 because she had no energy to forge ahead.

In May 1940, she returned to the States after suffering a nervous breakdown. She was admitted to the Psychopathic Hospital of the State University of Iowa for treatment. One year later, she committed suicide. C. M. Yocom, the executive secretary of the United Missionary Society, in a letter announcing her death, stated, "We feel that Miss Vautrin was truly a casualty of the war as any soldier who had fallen on the battlefield."

Vautrin's courageous deeds and spirit were buried under the dust for several decades until Hua-ling Hu stood in front of her tombstone (May 26, 1995). Seeing the tombstone was engraved with "Gin Ling Yung Shen (Ginling Forever in four Chinese characters), Minnie Vautrin, Goddess of Mercy," she was moved to tears. She made a promise that she would surely write Vautrin's biography. In 2000, Hu's *American Goddess of the Rape of Nanking* was published with its two Chinese language editions published in Taipei, 1997 and Beijing, 2000. The books generated lots of people's interest in Vautrin's courageous story. Shortly after, another Vautrin's Chinese biography was published in Nanjing. In December, 2002, Vautrin's bronze bust was unveiled on the campus of Ginling College of Nanjing Normal University. Vautrin eventually returned to her home in China.

(The end of the documentary)

While showing the Vautrin documentary at the meeting, Bonnie Kane read excerpts from Vautrin's diary from Dec. 14, 1937, the second day after the fall of Nanking to Dec.19, Dec. 22, and December 26 (see the attachment) .

Regarding a question on whether any survivors were either interviewed or wrote about Minnie Vautrin. Dr. Hu indicated that only few survivors of Ginling camp were interviewed by a Nanking journalist in 1980's, when he conducted a general survey of the Nanjing Massacre survivors (see Hsu Chi-ken's Chinese book, *Nanking Massacre: Eyewitness Accounts*, Taipei, 1989, pp. 56-60). They always broke down, all declared that they would not have survived if not for the effort of Minnie Vautrin. Hu also disclosed that she published her first paper on Vautrin's story in both Chinese and English in November 1994. Her books on Vautrin are based on such vital primary sources as Vautrin's diary (1937-1940) and correspondences (1919-1941) archived at Yale Divinity School Library, Documents of the Nanking Safety Zone, the proceedings of the Tokyo War Crimes Trial, and Vautrin's family letters as well as accounts of Vautrin's niece and interviews she conducted. Nancy Lo remarked that all survivors are now in their 80-90s. Sadness from the documentary and this presentation, were results of atrocities and barbaric treatment of innocent Nanjing citizens and she learned about Minnie Vautrin by reading Iris Chang's 'Rape of Nanking, the forgotten holocaust'. Jack Meng announced that he would donate these two books with Iris Chang's autograph for silent auction in future meeting. Both Ms. Vautrin and Iris Chang committed suicide and both are considered war casualties from the WWII atrocities.

Professor Sam Shen, math professor at SDSU and the president of San Diego Chinese American Association proposed to collect quantitative data to come up with unbiased estimate of casualties during the rape of Nanking using statistical procedures. Jack recommended all audience to read the book *The Rape of Nanking* which consists of inputs from all sectors: victims, invaders and objective parties.

During the refreshment time, Dr. Hu signed two books: ‘American Goddess at the Rape of Nanking, the Courage of Minnie Vautrin’ by Hua-Ling Hu \$20.00 and ‘The Undaunted Women of Nanking: The Wartime Diaries of Minnie Vautrin and Tsen Shui-Fang’, edited and translated by Hua-Ling Hu and Zhang Lian-hong \$30.00. The second books are available and can be purchased from APHAFIC (APHAFIC.ORG).



Nancy Lo presented certificate of appreciation to Dr. Hua-ling Hu with co-sponsors and APHAFIC board members: from left to right: professor Sam Shen (SDCAA), Lilin Wang (USCPFA), Mary Lee-Yan, Nancy Lo, Dr. Hua-ling Hu, Alex Chuang (SDCHM), Wendy Meng (SDCACs), Tina Young (SDCWL), and Jack Meng (photo by Dr. Chia-lun Hu).



Dr. Hua-ling Hu presented her talk on Minnie Vautrin (photo by Dr. Chia-lun Hu)



Bonnie Kane read the diary of Minnie Vautrin



Dr. Hu signed her two books. Lilin Wang, Mary Yan-Lee, Dr. Hu and attendees (from Left to right).