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A Battle over History

Different Accounts of the Nanjing Massacre, 1937- Present

On December 13, 1937, Japanese Central China Area Army and the 10th Army conquered Nanjing, the capital of China during that time. For the following six weeks, Japanese soldiers killed, raped, looted, and burned. This episode of mass murder and mass rape during the Second Sino-Japanese War (July 7, 1937 – September 9, 1945) is known as the Nanjing Massacre.

In February 1938, the Chinese Nationalist Government estimated that Japanese troops slaughtered approximately 20,000 Chinese civilians during the Battle of Nanjing and its aftermath.¹ In 1946, the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (also known as the Tokyo Tribunal) concluded that more than 200,000 Chinese civilians and prisoners of the war were killed in the incident. In 1947, the military tribunal in Nationalist China determined the figure should be more than 300,000.² In the 1980s, some Japanese scholars claimed that the figure should be less than 50.³

Almost eighty years after the Massacre, the research on this subject has been more intense than ever before. However, such a horrific event has laid in history quietly for almost four decades. Nowadays, Nanjing has become a mirror of larger political and moral imperatives

¹ League of Nations, *Official Journal*, vol. 19, no. 2 (February): 121.

² Takashi Yoshida, "A Battle over History: The Nanjing Massacre in Japan," *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 92

³ *Ibid.*, 98.

around the world.⁴ However, the debate on the Massacre has not always been like that. As many scholars point out, Nanjing as a site of a brutal atrocity is actually a very recent construction. In reality, the concept of the Nanjing Massacre did not exist “either in national or international awareness until decades after the event.”⁵

Charles Beard believes that every written history is “a selection and arrangement of facts, of recorded fragments of past actuality.”⁶ He states that the process of selection and organization reflects the historian’s frame of reference.⁷ Therefore, history would always be a product of particular moments in time with no exception.

As a traumatic event, the Massacre is sensitive to the development of national and ethnic identity and pride. This paper will cover the changing understandings of the Nanjing Massacre through history, particularly how nations manipulate history-writing and memory-making to serve the larger political and ideological purpose in China, Japan, and the United States since 1937. Based on history-writing as a product of particular moments in time, this paper attempts to explain why historians decided on their content and some associated problems during this reconstruction of the past.

Postwar Military Tribunals and Cold War Politics (1945-71)

The Nanjing Massacre was not widely known until the war ended. During the time of its occurrence, the only recorded evidence of this atrocity was the writings of Chinese and

⁴ Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking": History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 182

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶ Charles Beard, “Written History as an Act of Faith,” *The American Historical Review* 39:2 (1934), 220.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 228.

Westerners who had stayed in Nanjing during that time.⁸ Although newspapers in unoccupied China did print eyewitness accounts, they are just part of larger war stories to arouse patriotism among the public.⁹ Nobody could anticipate the scale of the terror in Nanjing during the wartime. The earliest records of the Massacre were from foreign correspondents, who broke the news in the International Safety Zone in Nanjing. However, the Safety Zone witnessed only an extremely small fraction of what actually happened in Nanjing with hundreds of thousands of residents.¹⁰

Initially, Western witnesses estimated a body count of 10,000 in and around Nanjing, which was quickly revised to 40,000 after an inspection of the city.¹¹ Nevertheless, all these earlier estimates were far less than the later burial figure of 200,000 validated by the Tokyo Tribunal in 1946.

On August 6 and 9 1945, the United States dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively, resulting in the death of over 129,000 people. The use of nuclear weapon in Hiroshima and Nagasaki accelerated the end of the World War II. On August 15, 1945, the Japanese government announced its official surrender. After the war, the Tokyo International Military Tribunal began to try Japanese leaders in May 1946. The Tribunal described the Nanjing Massacre as follows:

The Japanese soldiers swarmed over the city and committed various atrocities. According to one of the eyewitnesses they were let loose like a barbarian horde to desecrate the city. It was said by eyewitnesses that the city appeared to have fallen into the hands of the Japanese as captured prey, that it had not merely been taken in organized warfare, and that the members of the victorious Japanese Army had set upon the prize to commit unlimited violence. Individual soldiers and small groups of two or three roamed over the city murdering, raping, looting, and burning. There was no discipline whatever. Many soldiers were drunk. Soldiers went through the streets

⁸ Mark Eykholt, "Aggression, Victimization, and Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre," *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 12.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Daqing Yang, "The Challenges of the Nanjing Massacre," *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 139.

¹¹ Mark Eykholt, "Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre," 13.

indiscriminately killing Chinese men, women, and children without apparent provocation or excuse until in places the streets and alleys were littered with the bodies of their victims. According to another witness, Chinese were hunted like rabbits, everyone seen to move was shot. At least 12,000 non-combatant Chinese men, women, and children met their deaths in these indiscriminate killings during the first two or three days of the Japanese occupation of the city.¹²

The Tribunal estimated that over 20,000 Chinese men of military age were killed, and around 200,000 Chinese civilians and prisoners of the war were killed, and around 20,000 cases of rape occurred in Nanjing during the first six weeks of Japanese occupation.¹³ The judgment of the Tribunal has become the standard in Japanese school textbooks.¹⁴

During that time, most Japanese attributed postwar miseries to their own wartime leaders.¹⁵ Anti-war and anti-nuclear weapon sentiments spread over the postwar Japanese society.¹⁶ On April 30, 1946, the *Japan Economic Journal* commented, “the duty of the Japanese [is] to carefully follow the trial of 28 wartime leaders who initiated the military dictatorship.”¹⁷ On the same day, another editorial in *Mainichi Shimbun (Daily News)* also expressed similar thoughts, “We believe that [the Trial] is earnestly desired not only by the Japanese people suffering from the extreme difficulties caused by the defeat, but by the whole human race.”¹⁸ The Tribunal opened up the conversation regarding Japanese wartime atrocity among the Japanese public. As a result, accounts of the Nanjing Massacre became headline news. Furthermore, responding to the government’s new guidelines in January 1947, 193,612 wartime political, economic, and social

¹² John R. Pritchard, *The Tokyo War Crimes Trial* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981), vol. 20, pp. 49604-5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 49606.

¹⁴ Takashi Yoshida, “The Nanjing Massacre in Japan,” 71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁶ Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking,"* 60.

¹⁷ General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, Allied Translator and Interpreter Section, *Press Translations and Summaries—Japan*, Reel #12, May 2, 1946.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

leaders were purged from national and local offices, the press, and private companies.¹⁹ 5,211 teachers and administrative staff members (0.9 percent of the total at that time) who supported wartime militarism and nationalism were purged from the education sector.²⁰

Although Japanese responded positively after the war, the focus of the Tokyo Trial was never China. The United States, in fact, dominated all phases of the trial through General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SACP).²¹ Among eleven judges that MacArthur chose for the War Tribunal, only three judges actually came from Asia—China, India and the Philippines. In addition, the International Prosecution Section of SACP chose to try only 28 out of 250 high Japanese officials in custody. Some Americans were even appointed to help the Japanese lawyers on the defense team.

As a result, the Tokyo Trial did not meet Chinese expectation of retribution. In the end, the Tribunal only sentenced seven defendants to death. Only two among them are connected with the Nanjing Massacre: General Matsui Iwane, the commander of Central China forces during the Nanjing invasion, and Hirota Koki, the foreign minister at that time.²² The remaining eighteen defendants received sentence terms of seven years to life in prison.²³ Moreover, when the trial ended in 1948, the Cold War had already taken shape. Hence, the objectives of the United States had also shifted from punishing Japan to rebuilding Japan against Communism in Asia.²⁴ On December 24, 1948, MacArthur released the remaining seventeen men awaiting trial and

¹⁹ Akazawa Shiro et al., eds, *Handbook of the Tokyo War Crimes Trial* (Tokyo: Aoki shoten, 1989), 234.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 166.

²¹ Mark Eykholt, “Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre,” 19.

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

announced an end to all international trials.²⁵ No country received any war reparations from Japan.²⁶

Under the leadership of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek), the Nationalist Chinese government started its own military trials in April 1946.²⁷ However, soon after Japan surrendered in 1945, the Nationalist Chinese government resumed the fight with the Communist Party, which was known as the Second Civil War in Chinese history. Hence, the Chinese Trial faced several distractions. In addition, the main focus of the Chinese trials were not Japanese criminals, but Chinese collaborators, who had served Japan during the wartime. Betraying their own nation provoked a larger anger among Chinese people. Chinese courts sentenced over 10,000 Chinese for collaborating with the Japanese by the end of 1947: 342 of them were executed, and 847 received life imprisonment.²⁸ To the contrary, only 883 Japanese war criminals were tried, 504 received sentences: 149 had death penalties, while 83 received life imprisonment.²⁹ Among them, only four Japanese put to death were associated with the Nanjing Massacre.³⁰

The Tokyo Trial concluded that over 200,000 Chinese had died in the Nanjing Massacre, and the Nanjing Trial pushed the figure to over 300,000.³¹ Hence, the Chinese national and international law courts had “verified the Nanjing Massacre and set precedents for death totals in the hundreds of thousands.”³² Nevertheless, since tens of thousands of Japanese soldiers caused

²⁵ Awaya Kentaro, “In the Shadow of the Tokyo Tribunal,” *The Tokyo War Crimes Trial: An International Symposium*, ed. Hosoya Chihiro et al. (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1986), 83.

²⁶ Mark Eykholt, “Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre,” 21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Daqing Yang, “A Sino-Japanese Controversy: The Nanjing Atrocity as History,” *Sino-Japanese Studies* 3.1 (November 1990), 16.

³¹ Mark Eykholt, “Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre,” 22.

³² *Ibid.*

the hundreds of thousands of deaths in Nanjing, the execution of only seven men as retribution was definitely not justice in the eyes of Chinese people.³³

With the retreat of the Nationalist Chinese government to Taiwan, the Communist Party took control of the mainland in the early 1950s. The Cold War had a new shape. Threatened by the growth of Communism in Asia, the American occupying force in Japan imitated a red purge.³⁴ More than 10,000 members and sympathizers of the Japanese Communist Party were removed from both the public and private sectors.³⁵ Meanwhile, those who have been purged before for supporting wartime militarism were allowed to return to public posts.³⁶

In an era of perceived Communist threats, the United States continued renewing its support to a conservative Japan. In 1953, Japanese envoy Ikeda Hayato promised to the U.S. government that “the Japanese government will be responsible for facilitating a spontaneous spirit of patriotism and self-defense among the Japanese.”³⁷ The Ministry of Education subsequently increased its control over textbook authorization and rejected one-third of school textbooks for not meeting the new government standards.³⁸ The Ministry demanded textbooks to “avoid tough criticism of Japan’s role in the Pacific War” and inappropriate expressions such as “invading China.”³⁹ Thus, from the mid-1950s until the 1970s, the information about the Massacre completely disappeared from school textbooks in Japan.

³³ Ibid., 23.

³⁴ Takashi Yoshida, “The Nanjing Massacre in Japan,” 75.

³⁵ Miyata Eijiro, “Red Purge,” in *Encyclopedia of Modern and Contemporary Japanese History* (Tokyo: Toyo Keizai shinposha, 1978).

³⁶ Takashi Yoshida, “The Nanjing Massacre in Japan,” 75.

³⁷ “The American Military Acknowledges Japan’s Limitation on Its Defense and Promises Its Help,” *Asahi shinbun*, 25 October, 1953, 1.

³⁸ Toyama Shigeki, *Theory of Textbook Authorization and Historical Education* (Tokyo: Ayumi Shuppan, 1983), 253.

³⁹ Takashi Yoshida, “The Nanjing Massacre in Japan,” 76.

Meanwhile, the Nanjing Massacre became one more political tool for the Communist Chinese government to promote development and unity among the public.⁴⁰ In 1952, *Xinhua Yuebao* (*The New China Monthly*) published an article condemning Americans in Nanjing International Safety Zone during the wartime for aiding the invading Japanese troops, sending Chinese to be executed by Japanese soldiers.⁴¹ With a photo of the Massacre, the article announced a slogan, “Remember the Nanjing Massacre, Stop American Remilitarization of Japan!”⁴² In addition, the Communist Chinese government also manipulated the Massacre in domestic affairs.⁴³ Because the Communist Party of China took leadership after the Japanese invasion of the mainland, the Nanjing Massacre was a crucial incident to criticize the Nationalist Chinese government in Taiwan, which failed to fulfill its duty of protecting Nanjing.

By the 1960s, the popular voices had also begun to center on the Massacre in China. Chinese historians completed extensive research about the Massacre at Nanjing University.⁴⁴ In 1962, they created an eight-chapter manuscript, including data, photographs, new statistics, and interviews with survivors. The manuscript has served as the basis for other work on the Massacre in the following decades. However, under the shadow of the Cold War, China had recently broken off its relationship with the last foreign power, the Soviet Union. The Chinese government desperately wanted its people to be proud of their independent nation, but the suffering image of the Massacre contributed to the opposite. Therefore, “the Chinese government exercised direct political control over this research and classified the manuscript instead of allowing it to be published.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Mark Eykholt, “Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre,” 24.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Daqing Yang, “A Sino-Japanese Controversy,” 16.

⁴³ Mark Eykholt, “Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre,” 26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

The Normalization of China-Japan Relation and Textbook Controversy (1971-89)

President Richard Nixon's official visit to Beijing, the new capital of the People's Republic of China, in February 1972, motivated Japanese to normalize its relations with China.⁴⁶ In the 1970s, China and Japan began to have increasing cultural and diplomatic contacts. The Communist Chinese government desired the advanced technology and capital resources from Japan, while the Japanese government was attracted to the huge market in China. In the following years, Japanese trade with China increased from \$1.1 billion in 1972 to 3.3 billion in 1974.⁴⁷ During that time, the only theme to define Sino-Japanese relations is "friendship" rather than war in Chinese newspapers.⁴⁸ Japan became an integral part of Chinese development plans and the Chinese government avoid criticism of Japan's wartime behaviors as much as possible. Although Japanese militarism was still under the rug, Chinese leaders regarded it as "inconsequential" to present-day relations.⁴⁹ In 1974, the Chinese government set an entire month from September to October as "Japan-China Friendship Month."⁵⁰

In the 1980s, the Japanese Ministry of Education shifted further towards conservatism as the government attempted to tone down the words related to Asian-Pacific War (1931-1945). In May 1981, the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party Subcommittee on Textbook Issues passed a bill to tighten government control over textbooks.⁵¹ Responding to the new government guidelines, "Japan's aggression in China" was replaced with "Japan's occupation of Manchuria"

⁴⁶ Ota Katsuhiro, "Sino-Japanese Relations since World War II," in *An Introduction to the History of Modern Sino-Japanese Relations* (Tokyo: Kenbun Shuppan, 1992)

⁴⁷ Takashi Yoshida, "The Nanjing Massacre in Japan," 79.

⁴⁸ Mark Eykholt, "Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre," 26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁵¹ Takashi Yoshida, "The Nanjing Massacre in Japan," 85.

in Tokyo shoseki's *World History*; the old phrase "Japan's aggression in the three eastern provinces" was now referred as "the Manchurian Incident and the Shanghai Incident;" Japanese actions were not considered "aggression" any longer but only "illegitimate."⁵²

The textbook revision grabbed attention internationally. Finally, the Chinese government protested officially in July 1982: an editorial appeared in the *People's Daily*, the mouthpiece of the Chinese government, condemned Japanese government on textbook revision and questioned the renewed militarism among its leaders.⁵³ After Japanese officials rejected such criticism and condemned other nations for interfering in its internal affairs, the textbook issue dominated all the reporting on Sino-Japanese relations in China. The spread of nationalism across China. *Chinese Youth Newspaper* wrote, "We will never tolerate any distortion of historical facts."⁵⁴ Others directly threatened Japanese in military terms: "They are no match for the Chinese people. Under the historical conditions of the 1930s and 1940s, the Japanese militarists survived for only eight years. If they step into their old shoes today, they will inevitably come to a more disgraceful end."⁵⁵

Between July and September 1982, at least 2,439 articles on Japanese textbook revision appeared in newspapers throughout Asia.⁵⁶ In August, the South Korean government condemned Japanese government's behaviors in justifying its colonialism in Korea. In September, the Vietnamese government requested the Japanese government to correct its wartime descriptions related to the Japanese occupation of Vietnam in the textbook.⁵⁷

⁵² Tawara Yoshifumi, *The Depth of Attacks on School Textbooks* (Tokyo: Gakushu no tomo, 1997).

⁵³ Mark Eykholt, "Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre," 29.

⁵⁴ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Zhongguo Qingnian Bao Article," *Daily Report: China*, July 28, 1982, D4.

⁵⁵ Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Japanese Officials Defend Textbook Changes," *Daily Report: China*, July 28, 1982, D3.

⁵⁶ Tokutake Toshio, *Postwar History of School Textbooks* (Tokyo: Shin Nihon shuppansha, 1995), 206.

⁵⁷ Takashi Yoshida, "The Nanjing Massacre in Japan," 86.

At the same time, the Japanese revisionist articles appeared with a much greater frequency in the 1980s. Tanaka Massaki, the secretary of General Matsui Mwane, the commander-in-chief during the Nanjing atrocities, was one of loudest voices. In his book *the Fabrication of the "Nanjing Massacre"* (1984), Tanaka argued that no indiscriminate killing took place at all in Nanjing, and the Nanjing Massacre was a pure fabrication and propaganda created by the Tokyo Trial and the Chinese government.⁵⁸ The claim that the Nanjing Massacre was a latter-day fabrication received increasing support among the Japanese revisionists in the following decades. Many scholars such as Watanabe Shoichi also joined in this fight.

In China, the textbook issue soon escalated into a discussion not only about the war, but also about specific symbols of Japanese aggression including the Nanjing Massacre.⁵⁹ The denials from the Japan led to unity among Chinese people. The Massacre was transformed from a war atrocity to "an international symbol of suffering", which brought together all who "identified with China and/or oppose Japan." For example, in the United States, Chinese Americans formed the Chinese Alliance for Memorial Justice in 1987 in New York.⁶⁰

The Chinese government also used the textbook controversy to its own political agendas, such as the hope for reunification between Taiwan (Nationalist Chinese government) and the mainland China.⁶¹ Hence, the Nanjing Massacre also became a crucial political incident to either criticize the Nationalist Chinese government in Taiwan domestically or to show solidarity in condemning Japan internationally.

The 1982 textbook controversy did not hurt the China-Japan relations in terms of trade, but the controversy has escalated in the following decades. The Japanese revisionists began to

⁵⁸Ibid., 87.

⁵⁹ Mark Eykholt, "Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre," 32.

⁶⁰ Takashi Yoshida, "The Nanjing Massacre in Japan," 92

⁶¹ Mark Eykholt, "Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre," 32.

openly claim that Japan's war was to liberate Asia from Western colonialism, while Chinese began to celebrate war anniversaries and covered the war atrocities in public media.⁶² Many Japanese scholars followed "the fallacy of negative proof" to invalid the existence of Massacre.⁶³ Professor Watanabe Shochi argued that since there was no reference of the Nanjing Massacre either during the war or in Showa emperor's famous 1946 soliloquy, the Massacre was definitely fabricated at the postwar trials. Higashinakano Osamichi, a professor of intellectual history, reasoned, "since some fourteen Americans in Nanjing did not mention incidents of Japanese soldiers shooting Chinese civilians in one report to the American embassy, such alleged acts must not have happened." Based on their logics, because the Massacre was not mentioned in many contemporary English or Chinese publications in 1938, it must be a fabrication, although it might seem obvious to many why there was no record – Japanese wartime censorship.

Since then, Japan became a complex symbol where war, patriotism, and development intersected in China. On the one hand, the Chinese government used anti-Japanese war sentiment to "bolster public momentum for economic reform;" on the other hand, the Chinese government emphasized the friendly relations with Japan as a means to attain advanced technology and capital to further its economic reforms.⁶⁴ Some could also interpret that the friendly relationship on the surface was just a practical means that the Chinese government chose for its economy, while anti-Japanese sentiment was its true soul.

Yet, in Japan, two factions, progressives and revisionists, had never stopped fighting each other regarding the Nanjing Massacre and Japanese wartime crimes in general. Irritated by the revisionists' attitude, progressives set up a Study Group on the Nanjing Incident in March

⁶² Ibid., 33.

⁶³ Daqing Yang, "The Challenges of the Nanjing Massacre," 146.

⁶⁴ Mark Eykholt, "Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre," 34.

1984.⁶⁵ With the idea of facing the past wrongs committed by Japan, the group has had around twenty members across various professions from 1984.⁶⁶ In 1985, one active member of the Study Group, Scholar Hora Tormio, edited a two-volume, 750-page compilation of historical documents on the Nanjing Massacre.⁶⁷ War veterans who was in the Nanjing battle also came forward with their stories in the 1980s. Sone Kazuo and Azuma Shiro were two examples. Sone Kazuo even frankly wrote their experience with execution and rape in Nanjing in his books *A Private Narratives of the Nanjing Massacre* and *The Nanjing Massacre and the War*.⁶⁸ Although the revisionists still asserted that the Massacre had never taken place, all junior high school textbooks included some references of the Massacre by the end of the 1980s.⁶⁹

The Internationalization of the Massacre (1989 to Present)

In June 1989, the Communist Chinese government used military force to suppress the pro-democracy movements among students on the Tiananmen Square. Since then, the Communist Chinese government started to re-emphasize its patriotic education, especially from the study of history.⁷⁰ The official narratives stressed that the great leadership of the Chinese Communist Party under the doctrine of socialism led Chinese people to stand up and overcome foreign imperialism. Socialism was essential for China to keep its economic development and rising life qualities. To further arouse patriotism among the public, the Chinese government enlarged and renovated the Nanjing Massacre Memorial in 1995.

⁶⁵ Takashi Yoshida, "The Nanjing Massacre in Japan," 89.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Takashi Yoshida, "The Nanjing Massacre in Japan," 91.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁷⁰ Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking,"* 154.

As a result, the Chinese government has successfully built an official narrative on the Nanjing Massacre with a simple political message: “the revival of militarism in Japan must be stopped, and the Japanese government has to atone for the country’s past aggression against China.”⁷¹ Even nowadays, the Japanese revisionists are still notorious in the eyes of Chinese. The authorities emphasized that Chinese people need to work together and build a stronger nation to avoid another tragedy of the Massacre in the future. Some common slogans during that time were “Backwardness invites aggression” and “If the country is not wealthy and strong, its people suffer.”⁷²

Meanwhile, the debate between the Japanese revisionists and progressives has remained insuperable, which ultimately led to the incorporation of the Nanjing Massacre into Japanese history. They represent two fundamentally different understandings of national pride. The Nanjing Massacre reflected a much larger debate on the concept of an ideal nation: whether Japan should acknowledge its past and apologize for the wartime crimes or stand against foreign pressure and insist that they fought a just war which liberated Asia from Western aggression.⁷³ The revisionists either continued denying the existence of the Nanjing Massacre or degraded it as a common war atrocity with no significance.

Fujioka Nobukatsu, a professor of education at the University of Tokyo, was one of the leading figures among the revisionists in the 1990s. He argued that the number of victims was undoubtedly a lie: “200,000 civilians could not possibly have been massacred unless ghosts were killed.”⁷⁴ He further emphasized that if the Nationalist Chinese government agreed to surrender,

⁷¹ Daqing Yang, “The Challenges of the Nanjing Massacre,” 157.

⁷² Zhu Chengshan, *The Testimony of the Survivors of the Nanking Massacre Committed by the Invading Japanese* (Nanjing: University of Nanking Press, 1994), preface.

⁷³ Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking,"* 129.

⁷⁴ Fujioka Nobukatsu and Nishio Kanji, *Negligence of the Nation: The Danger of History Textbooks* (Tokyo: PHP kenkyujo, 1996), 1.

most of the Chinese soldiers would never have been killed.⁷⁵ At the same time, in December 1997, the Research Committee and the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility, together with seven other organizations, conducted an international symposium in Tokyo to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Massacre. Guests included participants from China, Germany, and the United States.⁷⁶

The declining of Japan's strategic importance in the Pacific in the 1990s also allowed Americans to rediscover the Nanjing Massacre. In 1997, American journalist Iris Chang's book, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* was the bestselling non-fiction book of the year. After decades of indifference, the American public finally became interested in Japanese wartime atrocities.⁷⁷ In the book, Chang asserts, the Japanese "outdid the Romans of Carthage (only 150,000 died in that slaughter), the Christian armies during the Spanish Inquisition, and even some of the monstrosities of Timur Lenk."⁷⁸ In 1999, due to political pressure, Chang had to cancel the publishing of the Japanese edition of her book. The popular accounts and mass media started to build the image of "stereotypical Japanese," who were either completely ignorant of their nation's war crimes or shamefully covered up the past of their nation.⁷⁹ To many Chinese-Americans, the Nanjing Massacre also became "an icon of ethnic suffering" and offered a sense of ethnic identity that "transcended age, politics, or place of birth." Many Chinese-American activists organized memorial meetings, concerts, and photographic exhibitions across the country.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Takashi Yoshida, "The Nanjing Massacre in Japan," 98.

⁷⁶ Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking,"* 153.

⁷⁷ Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking,"* 165.

⁷⁸ Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1997), 5-6.

⁷⁹ Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking,"* 165.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

In conclusion, since 1937, the Nanjing Massacre has become a political symbol in the historiographies of China, Japan, and the United States. Its meaning constantly evolved through time in response to the larger political context. The Nanjing Massacre has never been evaluated objectively as a historical incident, but always manipulated by nations to serve their larger political agendas in different parts of the world. To this day, Chinese write the Massacre as victims and their descendants, while Japanese tend either to deny the Massacre to preserve a positive legacy for contemporary Japanese, or they “write out of a deeply felt sense” that Japanese wartime atrocities.⁸¹ In the short term, the Chinese government will still use the Nanjing Massacre as a political tool to unify its people, while the Japanese revisionists will still assert that it is a latter-day fabrication.

Much of the time, people tend to forget about the long-time co-existence of progressive and revisionist viewpoints in Japan. We have allowed ourselves to adopt a reductionist view of the Massacre from either a “the Japanese” or “the Chinese” (victim-perpetrator) lenses. In the history textbooks and academia, the progressives view might actually have a dominant position in Japan.⁸² However, precisely because revisionist views arouse more challenges to established history and provoke stronger emotional reactions in public, they will continuously receive more coverage from the mass media, both domestically and internationally.⁸³

For the Nanjing Massacre, the ultimate question over the heated debate is, “How many Chinese were ‘massacred’ in Nanjing?”⁸⁴ Is it 200,000, 30,000, or less than 50 as claimed by some Japanese? Seventy-nine years after the Massacre, nobody in the world could give an

⁸¹ Daqing Yang, “The Challenges of the Nanjing Massacre,” 152.

⁸² Takashi Yoshida, “The Nanjing Massacre in Japan,” 119.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁸⁴ Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking,"* 181.

accurate answer. Furthermore, does the actual figure really matter as much as historians argue? Should the Nanjing Massacre as a human atrocity be as simple as a number game?

Nowadays, the studying of the Massacre has become a project of promoting hatred towards each other rather than preserving life. The Chinese government and Japanese government stand on the two ends of a spectrum and motivates their people to follow their attitudes. As historian Takashi Yoshida comments, “Too many people have responded to the Massacre not from a basis of reason, but according to national or ethnic identities that they have been reflexively conditioned to love or hate. In its worst moments, the debate over Nanjing has served to fuel the same kinds of racial and cultural hatred that tend to lead to massacres in the first place.”⁸⁵

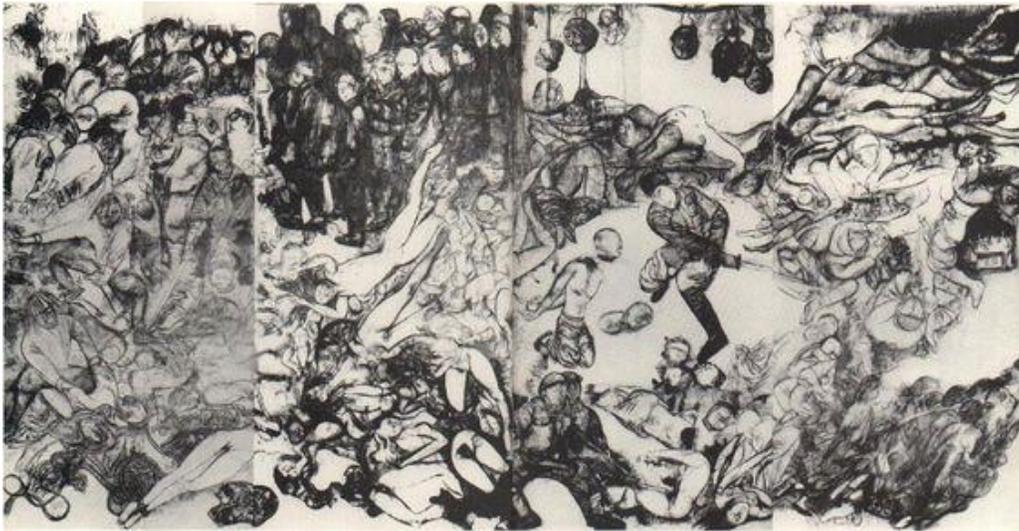
It is important for Japanese to recognize the Massacre did happen rather than deny and erase it completely from history. Polarized accounts and nationalism-motivated narratives are not productive for a meaningful dialogue and peace. Is it possible to have a shared historical understanding that transcends nationalities?⁸⁶ Can human move beyond the politics and have a real discussion on the Massacre? The Nanjing Massacre should not just be a tragedy of Chinese, but a tragedy of the whole human race. Only when people share the history and memories of human atrocities internationally, can we potentially avoid similar mistakes in the future.

⁸⁵ Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking,"* 182.

⁸⁶ Daqing Yang, “The Challenges of the Nanjing Massacre,” 162.

Epilogue:

The married Japanese artists, Maruki Toshi (1912-2000) and Maruki Iri (1901-1995), were renowned for their paintings on the sufferings caused by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In the early 1970s, during their tour in the United States, the Marukis encountered the question about the Nanjing Massacre.⁸⁷ After the tour, they expanded their subject matter to the horrors of Japanese wartime actions, including *The Rape of Nanjing* (1975). Based on their extensive research, the painting depicted terrible acts that Japanese soldiers in 1930s. Moreover, Mrs. Maruki even used her face for the Chinese woman rape victims. The painting generated powerful impacts in Japan and around the world. Since then, the Marukis has addressed Japan's wartime actions and hosted exhibitions on the Massacre internationally. The Marukis' painting demonstrates the possibility of having a transnational narrative with humanity. They sent an extremely powerful message to the world: humans can potentially overcome a narrow victim consciousness by facing up the dark episodes in one's own national history.⁸⁸



Maruki Toshi and Iri, *The Rape of Nanjing* (1975)

⁸⁷ Takashi Yoshida, "The Nanjing Massacre in Japan," 166.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 167.

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