

1

Introduction

The Nanjing Massacre in History

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More than sixty years have passed since the series of historical events now called the Nanjing Massacre (also known as the Nanjing Atrocity and the Rape of Nanjing). Although historians have analyzed from every conceivable angle other aspects of World War II ranging from the Manchurian Incident of September 18, 1931—now considered the beginning of the war in the Asian theater—to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, this literature pales in comparison with that focused recently on what happened in Nanjing in 1937–38. There are journals and now a host of Worldwide Web sites devoted solely to the Nanjing Massacre and associated Japanese atrocities committed in East Asia during World War II, and Iris Chang's recently published book, *The Rape of Nanking*, has enjoyed astounding sales. At no time during the six decades since the event have tempers been more inflamed or research on this subject more intense than now. The Massacre and related events must be lifted beyond the popular level, however, to be studied with greater nuance and in consultation with a wider range of sources.

How could such a horrific event lie quietly for so long and only in the past few years explode with such force? How did the

Nanjing Massacre become a metonym for Japanese behavior in China over the entire half century before the end of the war? Indeed, how has the Nanjing Massacre become so profoundly entwined with—even emblematic of—contemporary Chinese identity, as Ian Buruma has suggested it has?¹

Until recently the atrocities that took place in Nanjing in 1937–38 have not been accorded the importance or status they warrant in modern history, except by scholars. Certainly, this has increasingly become the perception of many Chinese, especially in the diaspora. This lack of attention to the Massacre has been partly attributable to the pride and determined self-reliance of the government in Beijing. The post-World War II world witnessed an extraordinary efflorescence of nationalism throughout East and Southeast Asia, and a concomitant unwillingness to play the victim any longer. After the collapse of the Sino-Soviet alliance the Chinese Communist regime assiduously rejected foreign aid or assistance of any kind, even in the face of a starving population and natural disasters (such as the Tangshan earthquake) of historically unprecedented proportions. Postwar East Asia's newly developed self-esteem has militated against countries' blaming others for their own failings. Thus, although the Chinese regime made the Japanese jump through any number of political hoops to reestablish diplomatic and trade relations, it did not demand reparations for the devastation that the Japanese had wrought during the war.

The denial by certain Japanese of the Nanjing Massacre over roughly the past two decades has contributed to a recrudescence of Chinese anger primarily at Japan but also at the Chinese regimes for not encouraging research on the subject earlier and exposing it to the world. The Japanese deniers of the atrocities are themselves part of a recent Japanese revival of nationalism that has cleaved to right-wing politics and rejected any foreign role in the articulation of Japanese identity. What actually happened in Nanjing is almost irrelevant in and of itself to these people—all that matters is that Japan's image not be stained, and therefore the atrocities must be denied.

With the rift between Taiwan and the People's Republic after

1949 and with increasing numbers of Chinese living in other Asian countries, the United States, and Canada, the complex issue of Chinese identity has been thrown into question. Unlike other peoples who have been exiled from their homelands and have had to forge an identity within a diaspora, the Chinese have had relatively little experience in this realm until recently. In roughly the past decade the Chinese diaspora has begun to speak in an altogether new voice. Where once it was split between those supporting Taiwan and those supporting the People's Republic, it now embraces a multiplicity of voices—embracing, for example, Tu Wei-ming's idea of cultural China, meaning all of those Chinese (living anywhere) who contribute to the growth of Chinese culture. The Communists and the Guomindang no longer control the discourse. As the diaspora searches for a distinct voice with which to articulate its distinct identity, it is finding that many issues have been swept under the carpet by both regimes. The Nanjing Massacre has become the most prominent of these.

The role that the Chinese diaspora has played in attempting to return the Nanjing Massacre to center stage may be attributable to yet another factor. One by-product of the modern era has been a kind of cultural deracination. Despite its obvious merits, the melting pot has led to the unfortunate result that few of us living in diaspora are well grounded in the sources, languages, and histories of the cultures putatively our own. Many are now returning to a search for an identity without the tools necessary to acquire it, often latching onto negative events in their history as elemental to their identity. Many Jews, no longer knowledgeable of their own traditions, languages, and texts as were their grandparents or great-grandparents, who learned them as a matter of course, cling to the state of Israel and the sanctity of the Holocaust as basic to their identity. Similarly, many Chinese in the diaspora with considerably less knowledge of their own traditions and history than their forebears have seized on the Nanjing Massacre as their own. Why choose a negative instance? Sadly, there are enough great massacres and atrocities to go around, and such an event committed

against a people simply because of who they are endows them with an identity perceived as unassailable and irreproachable; it immediately links all members of an ethnic group in victimhood and ties them to their culture, albeit in a superficial way.

These and other factors have conspired to turn attention, especially among diaspora Chinese, back to the events of the war, and the atrocities committed by the Japanese in that war have often been wrenched out of context and elevated to untold heights. Of course, the Chinese are not the only people who have done this. Many Jews have done the same with the Nazi Judeocide of the war, as have Armenians with the Turkish massacres of 1915 and African Americans with the long history of slavery and discrimination in the New World. Although magnanimous citizens everywhere have been sympathetic to the pain and suffering of all peoples, only the attempted genocide of the Jews has thus far achieved virtually sacrosanct status. One can deny or downplay the Turkish massacres, as the Turkish government regularly does, and go on with one's life. No one denies slavery, but one can deny that the experience was thoroughly nightmarish from beginning to end, as Dinesh D'Souza has recently attempted to do, without derailing one's career.² By contrast, deniers of Auschwitz and the other Nazi death camps are immediately and justifiably relegated to pariah status, consigned at best to fringe groups, by all thinking human beings.

Of all these massive, man-made atrocities, only in the case of the Nanjing Massacre has a whole school—actually, several—developed that completely denies or significantly downplays it. How can this be? How can established Japanese intellectuals in many fields—though, importantly, few if any in Chinese or Japanese history—buy into the idea that the Nanjing Massacre is a phantom, an illusion, even a ruse concocted by the Chinese and their allies to ruin Japan's reputation? How can such people still defend Japanese mass murders of fifty and sixty years ago as the acts of "Asia's liberator"?

Frankly, it boggles the mind. More important, it also demonstrates that each of these mass atrocities of modern times is historically and morally distinctive. Lumping them together may

serve some emotional end but it ultimately confuses rather than illuminates history, for this is one case in which comparative history may not serve us well. Asserting uniqueness does not mean that we cannot suggest a typology of such mass atrocities; it just means that we should not collapse them. Under-scoring specific contexts in which such massacres occur contributes much more to the furtherance of our knowledge of the events themselves than does a cataloguing of superficial similarities or a use of borrowed and sensational appellations.

The three chapters that comprise this volume, each based on years of individual research, serve this end of contextualizing the Nanjing Massacre. The authors and editor presented a panel at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in March 1997 and then decided to compile the present volume. Each chapter considers a different aspect of the history and historiography of the Nanjing Massacre in China and Japan. Although the following three chapters examine some contemporaneous reports documenting the atrocities themselves, the bulk of the material they analyze dates from the end of World War II and the war crimes trials that ensued. They examine, in the kind of detail we have hitherto not seen in English, the voluminous Chinese and Japanese literature on this momentous event of 1937–38. Each attempts to answer the kinds of questions raised here.

It is a telling state of affairs historiographically that I must say in this introduction that none of us doubts that a great massacre occurred in and around Nanjing from December 1937 through February 1938. These essays are by no means devoted to disproving the claims of the deniers, however. We take for granted that those claims have been made for an assortment of unsavory political reasons or misguided emotional or nationalistic ones. To grant the existence of such an atrocity, though, only begs the question. Far more important to our purpose here is a consideration of how the Nanjing Massacre has been used both by those who aver and by those who deny it—that is, how

it has been appropriated as an ideological tool or for national-ist mobilization. In particular, the chapters by Mark Eykholt and Takashi Yoshida confront the Nanjing Massacre in contemporary historiography in order to see the uses to which it has been put.

We have also refrained from engaging in what I call the “numbers game”—the practice of estimating and seriously debating the numbers of those killed and those raped in the Nanjing Massacre, in which certain Chinese push the figures higher and higher while certain Japanese do everything within their power to push the figures lower and lower. There are two different logics behind this game. The first is to render the Nanjing Massacre as gruesome an event as ever witnessed in world history and thus garner international attention and sympathy. In her recent book, for example, Iris Chang explicitly claims that the Nanjing Massacre was even more deadly than the European Holocaust.³ The second logic is to normalize the events and portray them as understandable actions given the bloody circumstances of the war then underway, as some Japanese critics have attempted to do, purposefully taming the horrors surrounding the mass murders and offering them no special place in history. While those Chinese following the first logic now argue that more than 300,000 were killed and 80,000 raped, Japanese following the second argue that fewer than 100 were killed and very few raped. The contributors to this volume are all of a mind that a great massacre occurred, and whether 200,000 people were killed or 240,000 does not alter the dimensions of the horror.

No amount of discussion between the contending parties is likely to bridge this gap. Indeed, on a number of occasions in Japan advocates of these two views have confronted one another, made their respective cases, and uniformly failed to convince their opponents of a single item. In part, this inability to reach consensus results from the different concerns motivating these groups. Scholars of modern Chinese and Japanese history—irrespective of their political views—virtually all admit that a massacre occurred in the Nanjing area, though they may differ on numbers. Others involved in the debate—be they scholars

from other fields or other professionals—seem all but oblivious to what constitutes historical fact. This is not a methodological or philosophical difference but an ideological one. Deniers of the Nanjing Massacre have acquired the strength of numbers to ignore the facts, the photos, and the personal memoirs. Their concern is with Japanese national pride and self-confidence, not with redressing a historical wrong.

In the final chapter in this volume Daqing Yang offers a more contemplative look at our subject in an effort to identify how we all might come to, if not agreement on what occurred in Nanjing sixty years ago, then at least some sort of consensus on the parameters of the event. I am less sanguine than he, but his reflections (those, incidentally, of a Chinese from Nanjing) make for deeply compelling reading. He confronts the difficult issues that only such a controversial and contested event can raise: history and memory, atrocity and amnesia, and the capacities of human beings to transcend nationality in the writing of history.

The aims of this book are several. We hope to place Chinese and Japanese historiography on the events that transpired in Nanjing into their contemporary settings in China (and Taiwan) and Japan, and to offer a more nuanced view of contemporary agendas. We examine what makes the Nanjing Massacre unique in modern Sino-Japanese (and world) history and why it has spawned such debate and emotions. Offering the English-reading public access to the voluminous material that has been published in East Asian languages over the past sixty years on this event, this book will serve to elucidate the complexity of details in the events surrounding the Nanjing Massacre as they are becoming better known in the English-speaking world.

The most important contribution this volume will make, however, will be to lay before its readers the highly complex debates in China and Japan since the war, and to attempt to explain why various schools of thought have come to the fore and why the debate has recently become so ferocious. This requires unpacking “Japan” (and “China”), identifying interest groups, ideological points of view, schools of thought, scholarly rifts, personal antagonisms, and political intrusions into scholarship, and drop-

ping facile characterizations based solely on nationality. Far too often, for example, Japanese reluctance fully to admit the role of the Japanese military in the horrific events on the Mainland during the war has led uninformed critics to blame “the Japanese” for historical amnesia, yet much of the most advanced scholarship in the world on virtually every aspect of the war, atrocities included, comes from Japanese scholars.

Although there are many different Japanese constituencies, there remain certain compelling reasons to examine these issues from a national perspective as well. It was the Japanese army that invaded China and perpetrated the Nanjing Massacre, and it was Chinese soldiers and civilians, abandoned by their own army and government, who fell victim to the Japanese military. As a result, to this day Chinese write from the point of view of victims and their descendants; the events are being reclaimed by those distant from them often for reasons of changing identity. Japanese tend either to deny the events in an attempt to preserve a positive legacy for contemporary Japanese, or they write out of a deeply felt sense that Japanese wartime actions, although impossible to exonerate, may somehow be atoned for by detailed scholarship exposing all manner of atrocities including vivisection, use of poison gas, and chemical warfare. At the international level, the issues here have become the stuff of political and diplomatic controversy over the past two decades, exacerbating Sino-Japanese tensions.

The Chinese and Japanese sides of these issues form the basis, respectively, for the analyses of Mark Eykholt’s and Takashi Yoshida’s chapters in this volume. As they demonstrate, the political and intellectual environments in China and Japan are altogether different, to say nothing of the increasingly vocal role played by members of the Chinese diaspora.

In attempting to set these issues in a larger historiographical and philosophical context, Daqing Yang raises a number of questions about how a scholar (or a general reader) is to come to terms with an event so horrifying that it defies ratiocination. How do we make sense of an event rooted, at least at some level, in insanity?

A number of the questions raised in this book are also the concern of Holocaust scholars. Although their writings may offer historiographical guidance or correctives, the Nanjing Massacre is best studied on its own ground in China and Japan in the context of World War II in East Asia. When the atrocities associated with the toponym of Nanjing are situated within the context of the war and the debates about them situated in the historiography of the postwar period, then we will have gone a long way toward placing this massacre in history and historiography.

Notes

1. Buruma, "The Afterlife of Anne Frank," p. 7.
2. D'Souza, *The End of Racism: Principles for a Multiracial Society*.
3. Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*.