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## *Essays: Current Issues in Asia*

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### **Memories of the Events Surrounding the Fall of Nanking:**

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#### **The Debate within Japan and the Role of Testimony in the Framing of National Histories**

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*In this paper I argue that testimonies have a crucial role to play in the historical and moral interpretation of events surrounding the fall of Nanking in 1938. I also contend that in the collective memory of contemporary Japan, this event remains problematic for reasons that relate to both historical integrity and the politicization of the said events. I begin my discussion however, with an account of renowned Japanese historian Ienaga Saburo's challenge to the state screening of textbooks and my understanding of the now perennial high school textbook debate in Japan. Both of these stories whilst interesting in their own right serve to provide context for my core concern with the role of testimony among the contested histories of what has become known in some contexts as the Rape of Nanking.*

The Rape of Nanking<sup>1</sup> as it is popularly referred to remains a contested event for reasons that can be argued to be a merging of issues of historical integrity and political agendas. In April 2005 it was reported (“Thousands in Beijing march against Japan,” 2005) that between 10,000 to 20,000 people demonstrated at the Japanese embassy in Beijing and elsewhere in China, in part in opposition to recently published textbooks that purportedly diminish the historical and moral significance of such events as the fall of Nanking in 1938. This would seem to add veracity to the view that the issue of historical integrity and the associated politicization of this event are inextricably linked. My initial aim in this paper is to address differing but linked aspects of the debate over the fall of Nanking as it has been played out within Japan. I think the debate is important in its own right but it is additionally interesting for my purposes here inasmuch as it is able to provide a rich context for my more primary concern of examining the role of testimonies for a more nuanced understanding of events surrounding the fall of Nanking in 1938. Given, as I have stated, the closeness of the “historical” and the “political” in this discussion it is difficult to keep the two issues separate and commentary on one invariably invokes the other. With this in mind I also venture to conclude with some observations on the importance of this event in the social and moral landscape of contemporary Japan.

I will argue that, in the case of the events surrounding the fall of Nanking, testimonies represent a crucial body of evidence in the ongoing discussion over interpretation of this historically contested event. This is not to say that a sense of moral completion can be achieved or historical certainty in terms of numbers killed, injured or raped can necessarily be adduced. Indeed events like this are notable precisely because of the way they continue to stagger the moral imagination. Moreover, the issue of numbers of persons involved will likely remain in dispute. However, and to reiterate, it is my view that testimonies have an important role to play in the telling of stories like

1. My mention of this phrasing and its capitalization here is to emphasize the symbolism this event conveys.

the events in Nanking in December of 1937 and the early months of 1938. Testimonies are able to bear witness to the trauma of wartime atrocity in a way that other “texts” cannot. They possess a proximity to the event that marks them out as significant. This is not to say, that they represent the truth in any finite sense but rather that they are an invaluable part of the project for a more truthful interpretation of the event. It is also important to note however, given the human tendency to exaggerate, embellish, fabricate or even understate it is true to say that testimonies are not without problems. Even so they are able to convey a sense of immediacy with regard to the past that is unequalled. Moreover, and in particular with regard to events like the fall of Nanking, given their capacity to capture both the moral complexity and the moral enormity of the event they demand that we listen with care in our negotiations with the past and thereby better equip ourselves to address the moral questions of the present.

First though, I begin with a discussion of Ienaga Saburo, perhaps Japan’s most renowned historian and a man who is aptly remembered for his challenge to the politicization of education in Japan. I discuss Ienaga’s challenge to state authority as a means of providing some background and context for the examination of another debate within Japan that is closely related to the issues surrounding interpretations of events in Nanking. I refer here to the controversy, now some years old, surrounding a Ministry of Education approved high school history textbook. It is worthwhile examining this story inasmuch as it serves to clarify the relationship between the themes of the “historical” and the “political.” At first glance, it might be thought that the notoriety surrounding this book published in 2001 and titled *Atarashii Rekishi Kyoukasho* (New Middle-school History Textbook and hereafter cited as ARK) is somewhat perplexing. However, closer examination of the circumstances surrounding the controversy shows that the attention it has generated is symptomatic of the depth of moral angst over wartime misdeeds of the Japanese military within and also outside of Japanese society. My argument here will be that the textbook and the controversy surrounding it are symbolic of a moral anxiety within the wider social fabric of Japan. Such anxiety is also evident in the sort of public discussion that is generated when a Japanese Prime Minister visits a certain shrine to commemorate war dead or when compensation is sought by former victims of systematic sexual enslavement by the Japanese military during WWII.

Finally, I consider the role of testimonies, both contemporary and subsequent to the events in Nanking with a view to suggesting that such accounts are the raw material of a radical reconfiguration of the way in which the said events have and continue to be understood in Japan. My view is that the testimonial material regarding these events not only discredits revisionist accounts of wartime misdeeds but also places a demand on contemporary Japanese society to take account of such events by adopting a more forward looking approach to responsibility for its past.

### **Historian Ienaga Saburo versus the Ministry of Education**

Until relatively recently, challenges to Japanese government intervention in the screening and censorship of school textbooks have been few. The most notable of these challenges has been that of the distinguished Japanese historian Ienaga Saburo who engaged the Japanese government in three lawsuits spanning three decades in a bid to end the government’s certification process of textbooks. In my view, one of the most authoritative accounts of Ienaga’s legal battle with the Japanese government is his own autobiography entitled *Japan’s Past, Japan’s Future* (2001). In this book Ienaga carefully and dispassionately details his long struggle to, as he puts it, “defend intellectual freedom.” (p. 196) Ienaga’s first experience with the Ministry of Education’s process of textbook certification came in 1953 when his manuscript for the publisher Sanseido underwent

certification. To his surprise Ienaga (2001) recalled that "... in my first brush with the certification process, my manuscript was declared unacceptable for astonishing reasons." (p. 155)

Among the reasons cited for rejecting his manuscript it was stated that his account of the Pacific War ought to be deleted on the grounds that these were events that the students themselves had experienced and therefore presumably did not need to examine (Ienaga, 2001, p. 155). In subsequent years Ienaga received further rejections and was required to rewrite and resubmit.

In 1957 his manuscript was rejected twice. After the first rejection the Ministry of Education's statement of reasons included the following rationale:

... because of excessive fervor to encourage soul-searching rather than interest in historical accuracy about the past, there is a profound sense in which it veers from the goals of teaching Japanese history: "through academic activities to recognize the efforts of ancestors, to heighten one's consciousness of being Japanese, to instill a rich love of the race". (Ienaga, 2001, p. 158)

It had become clear to Ienaga by about this time that the certification process was being used increasingly as a tool of the Ministry of Education to push political agendas. Richard Minear (Minear in Ienaga) has argued that the abuse of the education ministry through the promotion of political ends is lent extra weight by the fact that the bureaucrats who made the decisions on content, tone and style were known to have as he puts it "... either personal ties in the prewar era or close ties to the conservative politicians." (p. 9)

It had also become clearer to Ienaga at about this time that the very reasoning that was used to reject his manuscripts, that is that his writing was somehow at odds with the "correct" aims of teaching history in high school in Japan, was quite possibly itself contrary to the intent of the recent post-war amendments to the Japanese constitution. In other words, Ienaga had come to the realization that the process of certification as it was being practiced may well be illegal inasmuch as it seemed to contradict the constitution. Ienaga's argument was quite the opposite of that presented by the Ministry of Education. He claimed that careful soul-searching about the war was exactly what a high-school textbook ought to be emphasizing on the understanding that such events needed reflecting upon so that they were not repeated. In support of his claim he invoked article 1 of the 1947 Constitution of Japan and the Fundamental Law of Education which states that:

Education shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual value, respect labor and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with the independent spirit, as builders of a peaceful state and society. (Ienaga, 2001, p. 158)

Ienaga decided to test his argument in the justice system in the form of three lawsuits against the Ministry of Education between 1965 and 1997. In the final instance, the Supreme Court found in his favor on the matter of specific content in his texts but on the wider issue of the legality of textbook certification the ruling went against him. In the introduction to Ienaga's book Minear (2001, p. 23) notes that in spite of this ruling it is likely that as the contemporary colleague of Ienaga, Maruyama Masao wrote in a telegram to Ienaga, in the "court of history" Ienaga will emerge victorious.

Of particular interest in the example of Ienaga's challenge to state censorship of textbooks is the way it contrasts markedly with apparent state endorsement of certain other purportedly revisionist textbooks. The most notable in recent times and that to which I will now turn my attention is ARK.

### The Controversy over “The New History Textbook”

The most significant parallel between Ienaga’s challenge to the constitutional legality of textbook certification and the controversy following publication of ARK is the way they both illustrate what I refer to as the overlap between “the historical” and “the political.” As I have attempted to show with my discussion of Ienaga’s constitutional challenge to textbook certification, the publication of ARK did not, of course, occur in a vacuum. There is a history of state involvement in textbook content that can be traced back to pre-war Japan. Nozaki and Inokuchi (2000) write that:

Struggles over the national narrative existed ... before and even during World War II, when official narratives such as the Imperial Rescript on Education and other “fine militarist histories” played a crucial role in Japanese identity formation. (p. 97)

This is not to imply that such a situation is unique to Japan. Indeed the use and sometimes abuse of historical narratives in the establishment and perpetuation of national agendas and political ideologies has likely been practiced by the shapers of society worldwide for as long as communities have existed.

As for the textbook in question, John K. Nelson (2002), in a thorough and careful critique, has argued that, whilst not for the most part overtly revisionist, the book actively promotes a distinctly partial account of Japan’s history. Nelson writes that:

... through a strategy of asides, allusions, comparisons, and contrasts, together with omissions and obfuscations, several overarching themes are underscored.... The cumulative effect of these strategies is to give readers a positive sense of Japanese cultural identity. (p. 131)

Nelson identifies these themes as “the uniqueness of Japan and its people, [and] ... the fact that the nation has been throughout its history and, equally importantly *remains*, one with the imperial tradition at its centre ... [and the view that] ... the people of Japan can take pride in their long history as an independent sovereign state.” (p. 131) The most interesting of these themes from my point of view is the last, in which a relativised account of Japan’s wartime misdeeds is implied and indeed would be considered necessary.

Right at the outset the textbook introduces a distinctly theoretically relativistic and arguably problematic stance with the question: “What is studying history all about? (*rekishi o manabu to wa?*).” (ARK, 2001, pp. 6–7) The question, whilst in one sense quite valid would seem to be out of context for a high-school textbook. On this question the narrative claims that:

It might be thought that to study history is to know the facts of what happened in the past.... However it is not necessarily so. The reason to study history is to learn what people think about the past. (p. 6)

Whilst I am sympathetic to the view that history is legitimately a matter of interpretation and that facts are not like pebbles on the beach waiting to be picked up but rather are subject to explanation and require context before they can be adequately understood, this does not diminish, in my view, the importance of historical integrity. Sound historical scholarship is in large part a matter of striving for reliable research in support of carefully argued positions. In a climate of honest research facts have an important role to play. Facts may be difficult to ascertain and even when established by the norms of the discipline are not beyond disputation. Nevertheless they remain necessary to the process of assessing what is at issue in a particular account. Indeed this is particularly so in the case of conflicting accounts of an event. Historical integrity in part implies a striving for reliability

of the information at hand though this is not the same as saying that the facts speak for themselves. To reiterate, facts are subject to interpretation but all the same they are a necessary component of the established norms of good scholarship.

For the authors of the textbook though the role of “facts” seem otherwise problematic. Whilst the narrative acknowledges the significance of facts it seems unwilling to allow them to invoke reflection on events past. The narrative (ARK, 2001) states:

Let's stop thinking of history as something that is fixed and doesn't move. Also, let's stop applying judgments of right and wrong to history as if in a court of law based on today's morality. Let's use clear eyes and different perspectives to see what really is a fact. (p. 7)

This passage is particularly interesting. The first sentence, similar to the tone of the previous quote, seems to be suggesting a relativistic approach to history. That is to say, the implication is one in which facts are taken to be problematic and even unavoidably imprecise and unreliable. However, the last sentence of the passage claims we need to aim for clarity using differing perspectives to arrive at “genuine” facts. The overall tenor of the narrative is one in which historical accounts of past events ought only report and not judge. In my view, this seems to miss the point of learning about the past. Some events warrant judgment. However, the focus need not necessarily be in terms of the ascription of responsibility or assigning blame but can instead be to extend our understanding of the past. Judgment can be in the form of a taking account or a taking responsibility rather than a license to condemn. In other words, the direction the discussion takes can depend on the way in which we arrive at judgments and more importantly how we understand the role of judgment. Stiffer penalties and increasing incarceration rates across Eastern and Western social systems would seem to imply, for example, an understanding of judgment as entailing retribution. On the other hand it is also possible to understand judgment as encompassing discussions about the role of circumstances, individual dispositions and even luck, good or bad.

The discussion of judgment is also very much about contested versions of history. Nelson (2002, pp. 139–140) shows how the narrators of the textbook develop an account of Japan as the victim of colonial powers in order to arrive at the view that the true intention of Japan going to war was to protect their homeland and liberate Asian countries under European and U.S. control. The narrative of ARK (2001) states:

The purpose of going to war was self-protection and to free colonies from the domination of Europe and the U.S. and to establish the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. (p. 277)

The narratives interpretation of Japan as having acted for reasons of self-preservation and as liberator also accords with the textbooks use of the term “*Daitoa Senso*” (Greater Asian War) in preference to the term “*Taiheiyo Senso*” (Pacific War) used in textbooks more generally (ARK, 2001, p. 276). In other words, it seems that it is the intent of the narrators of the textbook to build an account of early 20th century Japanese history as a situation in which the Japanese government was largely devoid of responsibility for events as they unfolded.

As noted earlier Nelson has argued that a key theme of the textbook was the crucial importance in being able to “take pride” in Japan's past. This would seem to be a thematic imperative of the narrators and goes a long way toward accounting for the way key events are interpreted. Discussion of World War Two generally is couched in terms of the early victories of Japan's Imperial Army and in the latter stages of the war, with reference to the bravery that was exhibited in the face of overwhelming odds. Japan's military setbacks and defeats are for the most part back grounded.

However, it is the narrator's treatment of Japan's wartime atrocities that are of most interest

here. In particular I would like to focus on the way the text accounts for the attack on the capital of the Chinese nationalists, Nanking in 1937–38. In parentheses the text remarks that there were many casualties at this time, (*kono toki, Nihon gun ni yotte minshu ni mo tasu no shibosha ga detta. Nanking Jiken*). (ARK, 2001, p. 270) There is also an arrow within the text serving as a reference to page 295 for further comment on the significance of events. On page 295 it is noted that many Chinese citizens were killed, (*tasu no Chugokujin minshu o satsugai shita to nintai shita*). (ARK, 2001, p. 295) However, the narrative also notes that doubts have been expressed as regards the actual substance of this incident, with many opinions continuing to question the events to the present day (*Nao, kono jiken no jittai ni tsuite wa shiryō no ue de gimonten mo dasare samazama na kenkai ga ari, konnichi demo ronso ga tsuzuite iru*). (ARK, 2001, p. 295) Although not clearly defined it is suggested that the facts surrounding this event, presumably also numbers killed, are in doubt. The implication seems to be that the credibility of some interpretations and presumably their sources is questionable. However no mention is made of who is expressing this doubt or whose opinions are involved.

In the context of a commentary on the inevitability of unintentional civilian casualties during war the book states that “The Japanese army also committed cruelty to and unjust killings of captured soldiers and civilians of enemy nations in the regions ... it invaded” (*Nihongun mo, sensochu ni shinko shita chiiki de, horyō to natta tekikoku no heishi ya minkanjin ni taishite futo na satsugai ya gyakutai o okonatta*). (ARK, 2001, p. 288) The concern once again is that no mention of specifics is made. Not only are statistics absent from the commentary but such events as the fall of Nanking fail to be mentioned at all. Contrary to this trend, statistics of Japanese victims do get a mention with numbers and numerous detailed examples cited for the killings of Japanese by the Allied forces (ARK, 2001, pp. 287–288).

Nelson makes the very important point that the narrative is keen to expunge what it considers is the nation’s unjustified feelings of guilt. Nelson (2002) writes that the narratives’ view is that “... the Occupation’s use of newspapers, magazines, radio, movies and other media, taken together with the judgments of the Tokyo War Crimes Trials, cultivated a guilty feeling among Japanese.” (p. 142) In other words, Nelson argues that the textbook takes the view that the nation’s guilty feelings are the result of an unjust propaganda perpetrated against Japan.

Guilty feelings or otherwise it is my view that the interpretation of events and in particular the historical marginalization of key chapters of Japanese history of the first half of the twentieth century within this textbook are symptomatic of a sense of moral anxiety within contemporary Japanese society as regards such events. My focus is on the events surrounding the killing of Chinese civilians following the fall of Nanking in 1937. However, there are other events that also contribute to this collective unwillingness to take responsibility for the past including the use and abuse of military comfort women and the treatment of prisoners of war by the Japanese military.

Other texts seeking to refute assertions of atrocities at Nanking adopt tones similar to those of ARK. In a book titled *The Alleged Nanking Massacre* (Takemoto & Ohara, 2000) and in specific reference to Iris Chang’s *The Rape of Nanking* (1998) co-author Ohara Yasuo (2000) writes:

We are sure the American people understand our humane heritage over 2,000 years. We, as Japanese, take pride in the same humane history. We can no longer suffer from such an unreasonable disgrace to our nation brought about by unfounded absurd accusations. (p. 138)

Sentiments as those above contribute to an air of moral anxiety over what happened in Nanking. I will also make some suggestions as to the source of that moral anxiety.

### Seeking Historical Integrity

The authors Takemoto and Ohara on the one hand and Chang on the other represent polar opposites in the debate over the events surrounding the fall of Nanking. I contend that what is needed is a more nuanced understanding of the said events than what either of these two accounts offer.

Take the matter of respective claims surrounding the numbers of people killed in the fighting leading up to and during the initial occupation of the city by the Japanese army. On the one hand Chang (1998) writes:

This book provides only the barest summary of the cruel and barbaric acts committed by the Japanese in the city, for its aim is not to establish a quantitative record to qualify the event as one of the great evil deeds of history, but to understand the event so that lessons can be learned and warnings sounded. (pp. 4-5)

I believe that another reason for Chang's failure to more rigorously attend to the statistical record is because such accuracy is very difficult to achieve with the evidence to hand. Moreover, what evidence exists is difficult to substantiate and often conflicting.

Elsewhere Chang (1998) optimistically writes that:

The broad details of the Rape are, except among the Japanese, not in dispute ... experts at the International Military Tribunal of the Far East (IMTFE) estimated that more than 260,000 noncombatants died at the hands of Japanese soldiers at Nanking in late 1937 and early 1938, though some experts have placed the figure at well over 350,000. (p. 4)

It is the case that there is an absence of certainty as regards the "broad details" assuming by broad details Chang refers to the numbers of people killed among other things. Available evidence does not allow accurate numbers to be determined to the extent that estimates, as Chang herself acknowledges, vary significantly. Additionally, nowhere in her account does Chang provide adequate sources for the claims she attributes to others on the issue of estimates of people killed. This is a significant concern and compromises Chang's own claims on this matter.

In the editor's introduction to Katsuichi Honda's book (1999) titled *The Nanking Massacre, A Japanese Journalist Confronts Japan's National Shame*, Frank Gibney decries Chang's scholarship when he writes of her:

... cavalier treatment of the numbers of those raped and killed. The sources of her figures, which range from 260,000 to 360,000, are presented in a slapdash fashion; no attempt is made to evaluate them, or produce a considered estimate. (p. xiii)

Takemoto and Ohara's claims on the question of estimates of people killed are also problematic though for differing reasons. Disputing Chang's estimates and the veracity of her sources Takemoto and Ohara (2001) conclude that:

... the so-called "murder of several tens of thousands" has not ever been verified. As for the sum of the corpses during the battle of Nanking, we estimate 10,000 corpses from the burial records. The remaining issue is the sum of unburied corpses, who were mainly stragglers thrown to the Yangtze River. Although it is difficult to exactly count the sum, we estimate that it might not incomparably exceed the sum of burials. (pp. 126-127)

A number of concerns present themselves here. Takemoto and Ohara's interpretation of the burial records may or may not be reasonable. However, they unjustifiably discount other significant evidence on this matter. They claim, for example that the testimonies of members of the Safety

Zone Committee were based on rumor and therefore unreliable. As mentioned earlier, the lack of reliable data for numbers killed is an issue. This is true as much with the testimonies of members of the Safety Zone Committee as with any other evidence. But the evidence of the Committee, and other testimonies is invaluable as a source of information as regards what happened in those fateful months. This is true not just to understand the overall tenor of what happened but also in terms of much of the detail of what unfolded as it unfolded. To exclude or marginalize testimonies, both eye witness and secondhand, as Takemoto and Ohara have done is problematic and indicative of partisan scholarship.

In contrast to both Takemoto and Ohara and Chang, Honda engages in more cautious scholarship in the provision of a careful and precise account of events including interviews with Chinese victims, reminiscences of Japanese soldiers and excerpts from a variety of sources, official and otherwise. Significantly, Honda foregrounds testimonies as core to his interpretation. Honda (1999) concludes:

It is, of course, nearly impossible to calculate the number of surrendering, nonresisting soldiers or disguised soldiers who were slaughtered, along with the ordinary people who were caught up in the massacres or killed in the many acts of violence ... I think we need to take the approximately three months from November through January of the assault on Nanking as a single phenomenon. If we think of it in those terms, we are dealing with too much time to say anything specific about the numbers of people killed, but no one can deny that the victims of the massacre numbered in the hundreds of thousands. (p. 285)

In a sentiment similar to Honda, Timothy Brook (1999) writes that "... precise figures will probably never be established to everyone's satisfaction." (p. 3) Given the current state of research this is likely to be the case.

To return to the question of historical integrity I argue that the issue of numbers in this debate may miss the more important point that the significance of the atrocities that were undoubtedly committed was not so much a matter of numerical scale, though this too was significant, but of moral scale. It is surely the case that in regard to the events in question the large numbers of civilians and soldiers involved and the nature of atrocities perpetrated presage moral horror. My point is that historical integrity, in particular with regard events like the fall of Nanking, also requires consideration of the moral dimensions of the events in question.

By moral scale I do not mean moral enormity in the sense of a perceived requirement to assign blame or ascribe responsibility, though these may be legitimate projects, but instead point to the importance of reflection, in moral terms, on the record of the past in order that we can better negotiate the present. The absence of such reflection only serves to heighten the sense of intellectual impoverishment and partiality that accounts like Takemoto and Ohara's and Chang's convey. I suggest that reasons for ongoing tensions in Sino-Japanese relations stem in large part from an absence of sustained self-reflection, in particular though not only on the part of Japan, as to the enduring historical and political fallout from such key events as the fall of Nanking.

### **Responsibility toward memory and the role of testimony**

Verdicts, be they historical, statistical or moral, on the events that took place in Nanking may well remain unresolved in some senses. Nevertheless I believe that testimonial material is crucial to telling the story of the events surrounding the fall of Nanking. Indeed it is because of the ambiguity that could be said to surround aspects of these events that the case for the importance of testimonial accounts is strengthened. The evidence that testimonial accounts represent with regard the interpretation of the events is invaluable. In the search for a more careful account of what happened



they add an almost forensic quality. Some commentators though hold a different view.

In their evaluation of the place of testimonial material in telling one aspect of the story, namely their examination of “cause of death” and “type of offensive weapon” Takemoto and Ohara (2001) write that the available evidence is:

... mostly based on the testimonies of eye witnesses. These testimonies are all one sided statements ... and the contents ... extremely lacking rationality. (p. 127)

My concern is that Takemoto and Ohara do not for the most part engage in any systematic analysis of the testimonial material for consistency. Instead they dismiss such testimonies as those of John Rabe<sup>2</sup> as based on rumor. It is my view that such dismissals have more to do with maintaining certain political agendas and less with the project of achieving a sense of historical integrity.

So what do the testimonies relating to events following the fall of Nanking show? Do they stand scrutiny and convey narrative consistency? These are important questions. I would like to consider a sample of testimonies and accounts based on testimonies. Among reports that were contemporary to the event the first extended account (published in 1938) to be published was that of Harold John Timperley titled *Japanese terror in China* (1969). Together with Hsu Shuhsi’s book *Documents of the Nanking Safety Zone* (Reproduced in Brook, 2001) originally published in 1939 they remain among the most valuable accounts of the work of the international committee and the conduct of the Japanese army in Nanking.

Timperley (1969) citing an excerpt from a letter dated 15 December 1937, two days after the Japanese army smashed through the gates of Nanking, of an un-named source now known to be George Fitch reports:

... in two days the whole outlook has been ruined by frequent murder, wholesale and semi-irregular looting, and uncontrolled disturbance of private homes including offences against the security of women. (p. 19)

Timperley’s account and report of committee members testimonies shows that after a brief period of anticipation for what might follow it is clear that any relief that was felt at the arrival of the Japanese was misplaced and a reign of terror was quickly initiated. Fitch’s letter also details eye witness accounts of executions, lootings and rape and includes particular examples of each. In another excerpt from Fitch’s diary and cited in Timperley (1969), Fitch, writing on Christmas Eve, reported that when assisting an American naval officer back to his ship:

... halfway we were stopped by an army major who told us that no civilians were allowed further north.... We happened to be beside the Ministry of War at the time and it was all too evident that an execution was going on, hundreds of poor disarmed soldiers and many innocent civilians among them ... we actually had to drive over masses of dead bodies to get through. (p. 29)

The narrative continues with Fitch reporting that:

... the cases of rape began to be reported. Over a hundred women that we knew of were taken away by soldiers, seven of them from the University library ... Saturday, Dec. 18.... Wilson [the hospital surgeon] reported a boy of five years of age brought to the hospital after having been stabbed with a bayonet five times.... Between four and five hundred terrorized women poured into our headquarters compound in the afternoon and spent the night in the open ... Sunday, Dec. 19.... I also went to the house of Douglas Jenkins of our Embassy. The flag was still there; but in the garage his house boy lay dead, another servant, dead, was under a bed, both brutally killed.... There are still many corpses on the streets. All of them civilians as far as we can see....

2. John Rabe was the chairman of the International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone following the fall of the city in 1938.

There is perhaps no purpose to be served by going further with this story.... It is now the 11th of January ... there has not been a day that has not had its atrocities.... (pp. 34–44)

Honda in his book *The Nanjing Massacre* (1999) cites many testimonies of Japanese soldiers who themselves witnessed atrocity, the aftermath of atrocity and even those who participated in atrocity. I include some here as evidence of the accounts of the perpetrators themselves:

December 13: At around two o'clock in the afternoon, we completed general mopping-up operations and secured the rear. We reformed our unit as we moved forward and arrived at Heping Gate. After that prisoners surrendered one after the other until the number reached several thousand. Although the overly excited soldiers heard the officers attempts at restraining them, they slaughtered all the prisoners. (pp. 179–180)

For 2,000 meters, or maybe it was even more, there were more bodies floating in that wide river than I could count. As far as I could see, nothing but bodies. On the riverbank and in the river. These weren't soldiers but civilians. Adults and children. Men and women. (p. 180)

At 2:00 p.m. today, we received the following orders from the regimental commander:

1. According to brigade headquarters, all prisoners of war are to be killed.... At 3:30p.m. all the company commanders gathered and exchanged opinions on the disposal of the prisoners, and as a result, we distributed them among the companies ... who each took about fifty of them out of the detention room and stabbed them to death.... The first company changed its original plans and tried to burn them all together but failed. (p. 192)

There is also evidence, cited in Honda (1999), in official documents that indicates that the situation had been out of the ordinary even for a war situation. For example the Vice-Minister of Overseas Affairs and Political Affairs, Vice-Admiral Yasumi Saburo writes, “When we left the city of Nanjing and went to Guanghua Gate, I was told that until a few days ago, cars had been driving over bodies.” (p. 180) It is believed that Yasumi had written this account on or around December 19 some 16 days after the fall of Nanjing. Whilst acknowledging that Yasumi's observation is based on hearsay it is included here to emphasize that official sources also alluded to the moral tragedy that was unfolding following the fall of the city.

Some of the most powerful testimony of atrocity comes from Japanese war correspondents who eye witnessed events as they unfolded. One special correspondent Imai Masatake, again cited in Honda (1999), writes that nearby:

the former [Asahi] branch office ... on Xiyang Hill.... Four or five hundred Chinese men squatted.... One side of the lot was made up of a half destroyed, blackened brick wall. Six Chinese at a time stood and faced that wall. From twenty or thirty paces away, Japanese soldiers fired their rifles all at once into the backs of these men. Running to the fallen men, they administered the death blow with a single bayonet thrust to the back .... They were killed, one group after another.... Completely surrounding this scene was crowd of women and children, watching in a daze. (pp. 184–185)

Corroboration of Imai's account comes from another correspondent, also cited in Honda (1999) who was working for Asahi Shimbun named Adachi Kazuo. Adachi writes that:

Near the *Asahi Shimbun* branch office was an open space.... In the open space was a long line of Chinese standing under the watchful eye of Japanese troops.... The “plain-clothes soldiers” were shot one by one, right in front of their weeping and screaming wives and children. (p. 186)

Among the many testimonies from perpetrators, victims and bystanders alike there is one that in my view that is especially illuminating in terms of what it reveals about the power of conformity in time of war. Okumiya Masatake was an Imperial navy pilot at the time of the invasion of China. After the fall of Nanking he was assigned the task of searching for the remains of downed Japanese pilots. As such he had virtually unfettered access to Nanking and its environs. In an interview with Tai Kawabata of *The Japan Times* online (1999) he recounts that on December 25, 1937 at Lake

Xuanwu:

... I saw numerous bodies in the lake and on its shore. There were so many that I could not count them. They were both young and old, and both men and women.... (p. 1)

Later the same day he saw Japanese soldiers executing Chinese. He remembers that:

It was a quay facing the Yangtze River.... About 20 soldiers were beheading the Chinese with their Japanese swords.... Japanese soldiers were throwing the bodies into the river.... The execution was like assembly line work. Some people say that in Nanjing, there were no organized or systematic killings by the Japanese army. But what I saw was nothing other than organized and systematic killings. (p. 2-3)

In terms of the rights and wrongs of what Okumiya witnessed he admitted that:

I felt that because the army was doing it, it was not something a navy officer could come forward to protest.... Also because the executions were being done in an organized and systematic manner, it did not occur to me that I should interfere and protest. (p. 2)

This testimony is interesting not only for the level of candor it displays but also as evidence of the significance of how being in a uniform in wartime can serve as an explanation for conformity in relation to acts of atrocity. There is also the suggestion that the more “bureaucratized” the atrocity in terms of how it is executed the less likely it is that such actions will be challenged. There is now an extensive body of research that supports both these points<sup>3</sup>.

To reiterate, the testimonial accounts above concerning events surrounding the fall of Nanking are crucial not because they convey the truth in any simplistic sense but because they represent valuable insights into what Maurice Blanchot, in his book *The Writing of Disaster* (1986), has called an “impossible real.” (p. 38) For Blanchot, such events as the fall of Nanking, though real in the sense that they occurred, might be of such moral enormity as to defy straightforward representation. Such stories demand to be told yet their moral scale makes them difficult if not impossible to adequately comprehend. One of the key elements of testimonial accounts lay in their ability to help bridge this difficulty. And crucially, as accounts of what happened they don’t shy from conveying a moral dimension. My use of testimonial material and approach to the events of Nanking are similar to Geoffrey Hartmann’s (1998) approach to the Holocaust “... not as something enclosed in the past but as a contemporary issue requiring an intensity of representation close to eye witness report.” (p. 38) Likewise, though in a different context and extrapolating from what Derrida has argued, Giovanna Borradori (2003) claims that there is a kind of “responsibility toward memory” and that this translates as “... responding to the complexity ... [of the ] ... past, present, and future, and reinventing their relations.” (p. 172) As I understand it memory, in this case in the form of testimony, is not merely an issue of preservation of the past but more importantly understood as something embedded in the present, aimed at the future and embodying an understanding of the need to take account responsibly.

Testimonial evidence, perhaps unlike any other form of evidence, both contemporary and subsequent to the events in Nanking testify to its moral significance. They represent a kind of narrative of disaster. They evince both the moral enormity and the moral complexity of the events as they unfolded day-by-day, week-by-week and even month-by-month. This is not to say that testimonies are somehow indisputable. The necessary activity of locating such experiences in the temporal context of past, present and future means that testimonies are more like “situated truths”

3. Notable among them is Christopher R. Browning’s book, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. (1993)

inasmuch as they are always subject to interpretation. When I refer to testimonies as “subject to interpretation” I mean that they are subject to the usual intellectual activities that test their consistency within and among connecting historical narratives. So yes, testimonies are, and ought to be open to scrutiny, though this in no way diminishes their legitimacy as historical evidence.

In the presentation of the testimonies above I have attempted to show that such material is crucial in the project of accounting for events in a way that is sensitive to some of the difficulties of representing the past yet still have something of substance to say. The testimonies I have chosen are in no way intended to be exhaustive but they are a representative cross section of those involved. Finally, I believe they possess more than a historical or political value. Taken together they also contain an undeniably moral dimension but not in the sense that they prescribe a simplistic and de-contextualized moral reality. Rather in the sense that they imply the existence of a moral floor upon which to explore our moral understandings. In other words, they can serve as practical coordinates in the establishment of the moral byways that enable us to plot a path that is consistent, in a broadly Aristotelian sense, with the well-being of self and others. We can then begin to picture what moral life ought to look like and indeed what it ought not look like.

Earlier I indicated that testimonies such as those discussed herein ought to lead us into open-ended debate about the relationship between the past and the present. In the context of the events surrounding the fall of Nanking, the extent to which such a debate is possible will in turn reveal the shape of the social and moral landscape of relations between contemporary Japan and China. As memory recedes accounting responsibly for such events as the fall of Nanking grows more pressing. The Chinese governments management of the public unrest of April 2005 is testament to the view that China does not readily separate economic and political relations in its relationship with Japan. When asked about the anti-Japanese demonstrations after they first began in April 2005 Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi reportedly said that he would prefer to focus his attention on enjoying the cherry blossom (Parker, 2005). This would seem to suggest that Japan is yet to grasp the urgency of a more questioning attitude toward the past.

Even more broadly still, the directions the debate takes will also reveal the historical, political and moral paths we do in fact take and the levels of complexity of the maps that we navigate such paths with. In short, such a debate can reveal our very humanity.

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