

The Rape of Nanking

Was the Nanking Massacre a one off incident or part of a continuum of events?

YEAR 11 MODERN HISTORY

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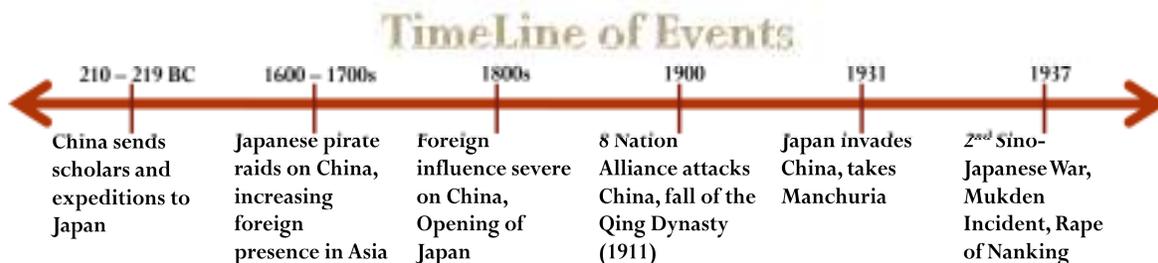
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Background

Humanity in the Far East has existed for many centuries and in most cases¹ in circumstances oblivious from the eyes of the West. Chinese civilization as ancient as the Egyptians has survived throughout the highs and lows. Contact between the Japanese and Chinese have persisted over the many centuries through a series of Chinese dynastical intellectual expeditions and extended periods of Japanese pirate raids along the Eastern Chinese coast and throughout Korea. Although both cultures share similar roots, competition between “the Asian brothers” could not have been fiercer.

Japan leapt upon the Qing’s backwardness, searching to exploit major weaknesses in the Chinese political, economical and social order. Not wanting to be overrun like China, Japan succumbed to American pressure led by Commodore Matthew Perry for “Bakumatsu”, the opening of Japan. The Japanese Shogun signed a trading agreement with America. During the foreign colonization attempts “to slice and dice” China amongst the Eight-Nation Alliance² from the 1800s, the Japanese position towards China was nevertheless aggressive and ignorant of the Chinese people. The Boxer Rebellion in 1900³ saw Japanese marines independent and under the command of the British attack the Qing Dynasty’s grasp on power. Under a model which would evolve to form the 1940 Greater East Asia Co-operation Sphere, China was first in line to be subjected to Japanese invasion in an attempt to secure resources for its industrialization.

Japan had already occupied Manchuria in 1931 and withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933 after condemnation of its practices within China. Many Euro-centric and Western historians mark the German invasion of Poland as the start of World War 2, but it should be stated that the Japanese setup and false accusations of Chinese aggression at Mukden and on the Marco-Polo Bridge in Peking led to the Japanese-Chinese War in 1937.⁴ Even Nanking, the capital of Nationalist China would not be spared as Japan’s reign of terror spread en route to the South Pacific.



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Road to Nanking

During 1937 Japan dug deeper into China as the world continued to look elsewhere. The Japanese Emperor was viewed as an omnipotent god and fighting for “his” nation was seen both a duty and honour by the Japanese Imperial Army. Just as the German Schlieffen Plan had been devised over a number of years before WW1, Japanese children were being taught that “inferior” people should not be allowed to occupy China’s natural wealth and resources. The 2nd Sino-Japanese war had already claimed tens of thousands of innocent civilian lives inland from and along the

¹ Lee Krystek, Wonders <http://www.unmuseum.org/wonders.htm>

² Henri Meyer, Imperialism http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:China_imperialism_cartoon.jpg

³ Christine S, Story of Imperialism <http://www.slideshare.net/bubble105/story-of-imperialism-china>

⁴ Jonathan D. Spence, The Search for Modern China, 1999, pg 421

⁵ TimeLine of Events, Roydon Ng, Created 4th August 2011

northern and eastern coast. As with Australians believing in Singapore's fortifications in halting the Japanese, many Chinese saw Shanghai as the last defensive position outside of the capital Nanking. The Battle of Shanghai often described as one of the largest battles of pre-WW2 resulted in the loss of over 600,000 of Chiang Kai-shek's prized Whampoa Military Academy soldiers.

Chiang Kai-Shek evacuated the Nationalist Government west to Chongqing after the Fall of Shanghai in November 1937. Although the defensive positions labeled as the 'Chinese Hindenburg Line' built with German assistance was completed prior to the commencement of the Second Sino-Japanese War, an inadequacy of trained personnel resulted in the inability to delay the Japanese march towards Nanking. Japanese air raids on Nanking from the end of September 1937 dropping a combination of propaganda posters and hundreds of bombs mostly on civilian areas. From the end of September 1937, Nanking was a mess with refugees from Japanese occupied areas and air raids comprising of both propaganda encouraging Chinese surrender and volleys of bombs indiscriminately targeting the city at random.⁶

By December 1937, the Imperial Japanese military authorities had decided that it was necessary to take the 'capital of enemy state' to signify a symbolic defeat for China and Chiang Kai-Shek. After discussions which Japanese General Matsui informed Prince Asaka, newly appointed by Emperor Hirohito that the Imperial Army was in the vicinity of Nanking and that signs of a Chinese surrender were imminent, the order was given to "kill all captives". Although Nanking had seen and survived many battles and sieges in China's history, this would prove to a devastating exception. Tang Shengzhi, a former warlord and political friend of Chiang Kai-Shek was left the impossible task of holding off the Japanese from three sides whilst being locked in by the Yangtze River with no means of retreat. Many of the experienced soldiers had either retreated with the Nationalist government or had already been killed in other battles with the Japanese. Using heavy artillery capable of attacking over Nanking's city walls, Japanese military superiority quickly overwhelmed Tang Shengzhi and his army mainly comprised of untrained boys.

Tang Shengzhi ignored orders to retreat from Chiang Kai-Shek whom realized that Nanking, a city which had survived countless attacks over the centuries would fall the Japanese, which happened on 8th August 1937. The initial orders to respect Nanking would quickly be changed to satisfy a long held Japanese dream to "Kill All", "Burn All" and "Loot All". Japanese soldiers were incited to kill the enemy and fight to the bitter end.⁷ Many of the civilians learned of the Chinese army's withdrawal and followed the depleted soldiers in a desperate attempt to escape what would become the infamous "Rape of Nanking". Foreigners living in Nanking were given urgent repatriation orders from their embassies. The American government faced its first act of aggression outside WW2 when USS Panay ferrying foreign subjects and diplomats was sunk in the Yangtze River on December 12th, 1937 by Japanese bombers. For a moment, it seemed that the Americans would have been drawn into the conflict, but just as the world stood idly as Manchuria was first invaded, no real action was taken against the Japanese. Although most foreigners were evacuated, several members of the foreign community came together and formed an International Committee although against Japanese wishes declared an area of around 5 square kilometers in the centre of Nanking including Ginling College and the home of John Rabe, the Nanking Safety Zone. John Rabe, a businessman and member of the Nazi Party backed by the Mayor of Nanking who donated food supplies administered this Safety Zone alongside the International Committee in Nanking during the Japanese massacre of the city. This Safety Zone became the home to a quarter of a million Chinese whom were fortunate to be spared from the terror of their fellow countrymen only a few streets away. Although a declared Safety Zone, the Japanese regularly raided its occupants often looking for ex-Chinese soldiers and women for sexual gratification.

Rape of Nanking

What had occurred at Nanking was a pattern cleverly devised and prepared from the beginning of the conflict between Japan and China. Japanese soldiers were trained to wage a war against sub-humans or "Chancorro" as the Chinese were classified as no better than bugs or animals. The Japanese held non-human views towards the Chinese both to excuse themselves from human responsibility and morality but also to signify their superiority as part of the "genuine" human race. Such act of "Social Darwinism" was common place in the Japanese attitude towards the

⁶ Rhawn Joesph P.H.D, Nightmare in Nanking, 2007

⁷ Whisper of the Blade by Erik Durschmeid (Photograph between pages 247-249)

Chinese as the Japanese saw it as their responsibility to remove lesser or in this case “non-human” species and allow for more efficient use of Chinese resources. The Imperial Japanese Army needed no practice for the murders and atrocities enacted in Nanking as innocent Chinese were set up by Japanese commanders and soldiers in Manchukuo for “bayonet practice”. An infamous case of the brutality of the Japanese army is seen through the glorification of the “victor” during a “contest” between two officers to be the first to kill 100 men. Japanese press later posted front page headlines announcing that one had been more “successful” than the other only because he had killed 106 men whilst his fellow officer had killed 105 because his sword had been damaged when slicing a Chinese in half.⁸ In post-WW2 interview, former Japanese soldiers now in their 80s still proud of their record were quoted as saying “I was taught to look down on the Chinese, as they were one rank lower than the Japanese and should be treated like animals”. In a documentary filmed in 2006, several retired-Japanese soldiers whom were partook in the Nanking Massacre recalled how it was customary to separate the male and female regardless of age, then with half dozen comrades take turns to gang rape every female until she would bleed in front of their brothers, husbands and sons before entire households were either stabbed, beaten or burnt to death.⁹ Only one of the four former soldiers interview expressed a minute hint that the Japanese act would possibly not have taken place if their captives had been foreigners.

The Rape of Nanking occurred over a period of just over two months with foreigners watching on horrified at the thousands of daily rapes, streets piled with mutilated and dead bodies, and what is now described as “the forgotten holocaust of WW2”. John Magee, an American missionary who secretly filmed some of the atrocities in Nanking in 1937 and smuggled footage out of China said that “one must remember that out of the thousands that were injured... only a few made it to hospital and were ever heard of again”.¹⁰ Even though on the display of John Magee’s film to the Foreign Affairs committee in Washington in January 1938 caused sickness amongst many Americans, little action was taken to sanction the Japanese for their actions against civilians in Nanking. With the eventual recall of both Prince Asaka and General Matsui to Japan, crimes committed from the Imperial Japanese Army gradually declined. Justified by their own nationalistic pride Japanese actions cost the lives of over 300,000 within 2 months in Nanking with many tens of thousands more injured, or omitted from estimations.¹¹

The Battle Continues...

Responsibility for the atrocities were eventually cast upon the Imperial Japanese Army, several Japanese generals, Prince Asaka and Emperor Hirohito himself. After the surrender by Japan, the International Military Tribunal for the Far East was convened in Tokyo to prosecute those alleged to have been involved with breaches of International Law. Although the Geneva Convention was not ratified until 1949, earlier conventions from The Hague meant that 28 defendants faced the Court ironically located at the War Ministry Office in Tokyo. The Japanese Royal Family was controversially spared punishment for the war crimes, with military commanders and government ministers carefully shielding the Emperor from repercussions. The International Military Tribunal for the Far East provided little comfort for the citizens of China and particularly survivors of Nanking whom limited to “Only a handful of Japanese war criminals... tried in Nanking”. The Chinese nevertheless took up the opportunity and openly vented their disgust of Japanese actions during the trial in Nanking. The Nanking Trial sentenced, Commander Tani Hisao to death in March 1947 for the many atrocities around China and in Nanking.

The Rape of Nanking which claimed over 300,000 lives in a period of 2 months has been labeled as the “Forgotten Holocaust”¹² by many scholars and in particular by Iris Chang author of *The Rape of Nanking*. Western attempts to restore the Japanese economy after WW2 led to ignorance given to China especially as Communists had formed a new government which was still fragmented internally and diplomatically weak. From the end of WW2, Japanese officials have denied existence of the Nanking Massacre, some saying that it was a normal component in military conflict. Emperor Hirohito claimed that action was needed to “stabilize and liberate East Asia”. Even until recent times, the Japanese governments have been under pressure to pay indemnities and offer formal apologies to victims of

⁸ Japan vs. China – Nanking Massacre (Parts 1 – 9) Uploaded by IuliCata85

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADtpqNFWYJl>

⁹ The Rape of Nanking, SBS TV Recording, 2nd June 2010

¹⁰ Lu Chuan, *City of Life and Death*, 2007

¹¹ Laurence Rees, *Horror in the East*, 2001 pg. 30-34, 52

¹² Iris Chang, *Chang, The Rape of Nanking*

the Nanking Massacre. Although a statement expressing “remorse” for actions in the Pacific War in 1995 was issued by the Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, many international observers and especially the Chinese continue to demand a formal apology and compensation.

In continuous attempts to save “face” and uphold national pride, the Japanese government has downplayed the War in China as half-truths even in school history curriculums giving little to no mention of Japanese action in China let alone Nanking. Some Japanese political parties such as the Liberal Democrats who held government nearly continuously until 2009 hold the view that Japan was a victim in WW2 and support moves to continue to reject both changes to acknowledge Japanese involvement in China and continue to oppose Japanese compensation to China. Even today, many Japanese hold a colonialist view that involvement in Nanking and surrounds was for the greater good of China. For Japan to acknowledge wrongdoing would severely undermine the current mentality of Japanese society and reveal “Japan’s National Shame”¹³ and in such process potentially expose Japan to legal liability. For most of the 20th century, events at Nanking were covered up or ignored until publication of several highly respected works “The Rape of Nanking” by Iris Chang, “Tokyo” by Mo Hayder and “The Nanjing Massacre” by Japanese writer Honda Katsuichi. Through the release of such literature which has been challenged by the Japanese government, only now have incidents in Nanking been better understood and the truth known better.

Controversy has erupted over Japanese political leaders’ continual support and visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honours Japanese war dead including convicted war criminals from WW2. Over the past decade, attempts to improve China – Japanese relations have been on a stop start basis with repeated meetings and continual pressure on Japan to cease actions which many observers internationally and in China and Korea deem as offensive to the victims of the Japanese military atrocities of WW2. There have also been a string of civil cases between Chinese activists and the Japanese government relating to the crimes committed by the Imperial Japanese Army. Many historians have labeled Japan’s continual denial of wrongdoing as the unwillingness to learn from its mistakes and that “Japan carries not only the legal burden but the moral obligation to acknowledge the evil it perpetrated at Nanjing”.¹⁴

Iris Chang, a late Chinese-American author of “The Rape of Nanking” says that Japan needs to “achieve closure on a dark chapter that stained its history” through a minimum of a sincere apology. The struggle between China and Japan over its status in Asia is bound to continue, not only through militarism such as weapons development programs but also in economic and diplomatic terms. The Sino-Japanese rivalry has existed over thousands of years, often with fatal consequences is bound to continue as both countries exercise nationalism and pride in cultures which once shared the same origins.

¹³ The Nanjing Massacre: A Japanese Journalist Confronts Japan's National Shame

¹⁴ Gendercide Watch, The Nanking Massacre, http://www.gendercide.org/case_nanking.html