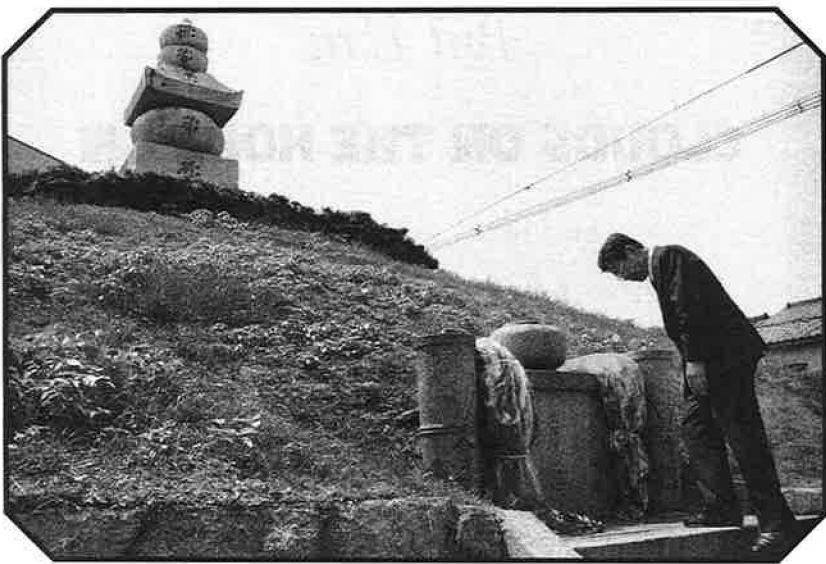


THUNDER FROM THE EAST

**PORTRAIT
OF A
RISING
ASIA**

*Nicholas D. Kristof
and Sheryl WuDunn*

Alfred A. Knopf  New York 2000



Ryu Gu Che, a Korean-Japanese, pays his respects at the Ear Mound in Kyoto, Japan. This hill was made four hundred years ago with the ears and noses of perhaps one hundred thousand Koreans whom the Japanese army slaughtered in its attacks on Korea. As proof of their victories, army units brought back the ears and noses to Japan, and so there are several such ear mounds and nose mounds around Japan. Most Japanese have never heard of the Ear Mound, but predictably it is better known in Korea, where it is regarded as a product of typical Japanese brutality.

CHAPTER TEN

Prisoners of History

NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

—WILLIAM FAULKNER

Almost every time I visited Omiya, I saw Shinzaburo Horie in his garden. A lean and rugged farmer in his early eighties, he was all muscle and gristle and thinning hair and leathery skin, tirelessly tending his crops in the hot midday sun. Even as an old man he was athletic; and I believed the tales I had heard about how as a youth he had leaped from the cliff into Omiya's swimming hole forty feet below—the only boy ever to do that. Horie lived on the main street of Omiya and always waved politely to me as I passed, adding a greeting of "konnichiwa" if he was within speaking range. He came across as a bit shy and formal and gentlemanly, a model of benevolence.

One day he agreed to talk to me about bygone days of Omiya and Japan. Horie sat ramrod straight in his chair, wearing nice, clean slacks and a shirt that looked as stiff as he did, and so I tried to set him at ease, joking

about my poor Japanese and asking gentle questions about life in prewar Omiya. Then gradually we came to the war and his life as a soldier, and he began to fidget nervously.

"Where did you serve in the war?" I asked.

"China." He sighed, took deep breaths, looked down at his shoes, and added: "In Manchuria."

"What did you do there?"

"I was just a soldier," he replied without looking at me. "It was a terrible time. There was very little food, and it was cold and dangerous. It was awful." He fidgeted even more, shifting his weight back and forth on the chair, occasionally stroking his stubby chin nervously.

"Did you see much fighting?" I asked.

Horie grew tense and agitated. "Some," he said briefly, and then he sidetracked the conversation with stray and irrelevant comments. Yet gradually he began to peel away his memories, and he described his military camp in China. I asked about his life and what he remembered, and his hands began to shake like dry leaves in the wind. Finally, after a long parry-and-thrust conversation, I asked: "What was the worst thing about life there?" He took a deep breath, gulped, and let down his guard.

"There was one time when I ate human flesh," he said, and he sighed deeply and paused to control himself. He leaned forward, looking me straight in the eye for the first time, and his eyes were aching with pain. "I've never told anybody, not even my wife," he whispered. "Nobody knows."

My stomach was churning, and I wondered if I had heard him right. "How did it happen?"

"My buddies and I were all hungry, because there was no food anywhere." Horie looked as if he might cry. "And then all of a sudden there was some fresh meat for sale in the local market and we quickly bought it and cooked it."

I started to say something, but he silenced me and continued: "It was the first meat we'd had in a long time, and we thought it was delicious. We were thrilled."

Horie paused and took several deep breaths as he stared down at his shoes before continuing: "And then the military police came around, asking whether anybody had bought meat in the market. We said that we had, and they explained what had happened. The meat was from a Chinese boy of about sixteen."



Shinzaburo Horie and his wife stroll through Omiya, Japan. He has never told his wife about his wartime experiences.

"What had happened?" I asked softly.

"Some Japanese soldiers who were hungry had killed the boy and eaten some of his meat and sold the rest to the Chinese merchant, and we bought it from the merchant."

Horie stopped and stared down at the floor for a long time. Finally, I intruded: "Was anybody punished for that?"

"I heard that the Japanese soldiers were punished for killing and eating the boy, but I don't know," he said heavily. "It was just a rumor. And anyway, I don't know how they were punished. My buddies and I didn't get into trouble."

"Of course not," I said, trying to reassure him. "It wasn't your fault. It was an accident. You didn't know that it was human flesh."

"I can't forget the fact that I ate a human being," Horie said, looking at me piercingly. "It was only one time, and not so much meat, but after sixty years I can't put it behind me."

Nor can Asia as a whole. Just as Horie was still haunted by his past, so is most of Asia. The continent's future remains deeply undermined by its history, whose antagonisms could lead to new wars or to an unraveling of a

promising economic future. My optimism about Asia is tempered by these concerns, for Asia's future seems a hostage to its history, and I feel the shadow of the past acutely when I talk to ordinary people like Horie. Often they try, like Horie, to keep the past buried, but it always climbs out again.

Horie was part of an army that was as courageous as it was cruel. While every American soldier in the Pacific in World War II was backed by four tons of equipment, each Japanese soldier had just two pounds' worth. One Allied soldier surrendered for every three dead, while among the Japanese 120 died for each one who surrendered. Yet these brave, disciplined troops bayoneted babies and raped girls and beheaded prisoners on a scale that exceeded that of any other modern army.

I think of Horie as a symbol of Asia's difficulties in coming to terms with its past. Just as he can't even talk to his wife or grandchildren about what happened, so Asia is weighed down by a history that for decades has festered without healing. Although Asia has seemed remarkably peaceful since the end of the Vietnam War, the peace has been a fragile one, concealing antagonisms that could still erupt in an instant. Historical grievances still create risks of war—over Taiwan, Kashmir, and islands such as the Spratlys, Paracels, and Diaoyu/Senkakus—and lead countries to pour resources into fighter planes and submarines rather than education and fiber-optic cable. The historical burdens also stand in the way of economic cooperation. Japan's capital cannot be used to exploit Siberia's resources, for example, because of the bitterness that is one of the great legacies of World War II. And the mutual suspicions still block, for now, the kind of integration that has united Europe or knit North America together in trade. For Asia to achieve a bright future, it will still have to overcome its past.

Japan is at the nub of this problem. For more than half a century, it has refused to confront its past squarely, and this has created antagonisms in the region and encouraged nationalism in both China and Korea. Furthermore, Asia needs a leader, and a well-trusted Japan could help set Asia's agenda for trade and finance, for fighting crime and pollution, for ensuring security along sea lanes. But Japan's inability to face its past has left it unable to play that leadership role. Tokyo has been incapable of mounting a meaningful security policy even for itself, and when Japanese are asked in surveys what should be done if another country invades Japan, only 46 percent say that Japan should use force to respond. In short, one of the greatest hurdles in Asia's future is its past.

History has left many potential flashpoints, and in several of them—

such as Taiwan—a war would set back the region for decades. Some nuclear proliferation experts believe that the likeliest place on Earth for an exchange of nuclear weapons is the India-Pakistan border. There are plenty of other security crises that could erupt over Asia as well, and nearly all are rooted in unresolved historical disputes and antagonisms.

The way that Asia's past continually intrudes into the present was driven home to me during a conversation in Beijing. Sheryl and I were having a secret meeting over dinner with a leader of China's underground democracy movement, so we huddled at a distant corner table of a restaurant. The democracy leader was someone I knew well and admired greatly for his courage and commitment, and so I watched respectfully as he rapped on the table suspiciously to look for bugs. Then when the waitresses stepped away, I listened intently as he leaned forward and told us his secret plans for advancing human rights.

"We're going to kill Japanese," he said brightly.

"What?"

"We're going to kill Japanese businessmen. That'll scare them so they won't invest here. And then the government will really be screwed!"

"You're not serious?"

"Of course we're serious. We can't demonstrate these days and we can't publish. The only thing we can do for democracy is kill Japanese businessmen."

"But how can you promote democracy by killing people?"

"Not people. They're Japanese. Japanese devils."

He never did kill anybody, but the dinner left me shaken. For weeks I worried that some Japanese acquaintance in Beijing would be stabbed by my pro-democracy friend. And he was representative of a broad swath of public opinion. A poll published in 1999 by Dentsu, a Japanese public relations firm, found that 69 percent of Chinese said they disliked Japanese, while 67 percent of South Koreans said they too disliked Japanese.

Yet for all the animosities and dangers, a hugely important change is beginning to take place: Asia is gradually coming to confront its past. It is an unsteady process, and looking backward has created new disputes and resentments. Yet delicately, uncertainly, Asia is moving to face its past and scrub away at the distrust. If this process continues, it will ultimately make Asia a much more stable and vital region. This historical restructuring is almost as critical for Asia as its economic restructuring.

With Horie, I came to see that process unfolding. That day when he told me about eating human flesh, I continued to speak with him for

another hour or so, neither of us touching cups of green tea that had grown cold. Finally, after a bit of small talk, I offered a final question. "Sometimes we all do things rashly, or wrongly, and later we wish we could undo them. I wonder, was there anything you did rashly during the war and now regret?"

Horie's hands began rattling again, but he scarcely paused. "One day always comes back to me," he began. "We were searching a Chinese village for guerrillas. We were sure they were around, but we couldn't find them. Then I saw a stack of dried reeds, with a bit of an arm visible, holding a gun."

"What did you do?"

"I charged with my bayonet and thrust it into the reeds at chest height, and I heard a scream. I pulled the rifle out, and there was a baby skewered on the bayonet." Horie stopped to regain control of himself, and his face twitched for a moment in grief.

"A baby?"

"The baby was maybe six months old, and the hilt had gotten caught in its belt, so it was stuck to the bayonet. It turned out that the baby's mother was a guerrilla, holding the baby as she hid in the reeds. The bayonet had gone through her as well as the baby, so she died as well."

He paused again, his face gaunt and overcome by the rush of memories.

"You're sure you saw an arm sticking out of the reeds?" I asked. "You weren't just jabbing your bayonet into the reeds to see if someone was there?"

"No, no! I saw an arm."

I don't entirely believe Horie. Chinese guerrillas were short of weapons, and it seems unlikely to me that a nursing mother with a baby would be packing a gun, particularly if she were living in the village. If I were guessing, I would say that Horie was looking for guerrillas and jabbing his bayonet at potential hiding places like the pile of reeds. It would be a natural action for a jittery Japanese soldier in a Chinese village, just as it would be natural for a young Chinese woman to try to hide when Japanese troops showed up.

Yet after talking to Horie, I felt more respect than ever for him. He was a good and brave man who had done something terrible, but it was probably unintentional and it haunted him every day. Horie wanted nothing to do with the excuses that Japan's rightists always make for wartime atrocities. "Japan did terrible things in the war," he said. "We have to show

remorse. We have to apologize. What we did was wrong. We should absolutely apologize to China and Korea. Absolutely."

Horie's torment at what he had done, his own strong belief that Japan should make amends, his willingness to open up to me—these underscored the distance Japan and other countries had come over the years. The wounds of history are still festering in Asia and they are nurturing a dangerous nationalism, but they are finally being treated. With time, with luck, they will heal.

One problem is that Japan has not been able to translate into national policy the penitence that people like Horie feel. Japan has never offered official compensation to the "comfort women"—girls from Korea and other countries whom it forced to be sex slaves for army troops. In 1998, the Japanese authorities did deign to pay two Korean women pensions for their forced labor during the war at a Japanese factory. But the one-time lump-sum pension that Japan agreed to pay was twelve cents each.

A sizable segment of the Japanese population feels no remorse for the war and vehemently resists any apology. Seisuke Okuno, a former cabinet minister, led 161 members of the Diet in backing a resolution opposing any apology for World War II, and he told me that if any country is guilty of war crimes, it is the United States—for dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japan's purpose in invading its neighbors, he insisted, was entirely noble: "These countries had been colonized and oppressed by whites. Our purpose was to free and stabilize them."

The popularity of this view was underscored by the success of the film *Pride*, Japan's biggest box-office hit in the first half of 1998. *Pride* paints wartime prime minister Hideki Tojo as a national hero, a kind and honorable man thrust into war by the West and unfairly executed as a war criminal. Japanese diplomats insist that movies like *Pride* are merely a tribute to pluralism, and they argue that their country has apologized many times for its wartime conduct. But Japan's statements normally do not use a word for apology, such as *shazai*, but rather the vague term *hansei*, which can mean remorse or self-reflection. When Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama, a bleeding-heart liberal, asked the Diet to pass a resolution of contrition, parliamentarians replaced the word "apology" with *hansei* and "aggressive acts" with "aggressive-like acts."

How can people make excuses for the inexcusable? They can do so with remarkable panache. Take Kubo, a pudgy fellow who during the war had served in Unit 731, a top-secret organization that conducted biological

warfare against China. A farmer living in northern Japan, Kubo agreed to see me in a friend's office in the town center. He seemed friendly, with a frequent grin that displayed a mouthful of silver. His graying crewcut topped a round face with a week's worth of gray stubble rising from a lined, sun-darkened jaw. Muscular and powerful, with callused and weather-beaten hands, he was well scrubbed and tidied up, decked out in his best pair of gray slacks. His wife, a thin, frail, graying woman, had brought rice rolls for us to eat as we talked. The two of them seemed like perfect grandparents, the model of a sweet old Japanese couple, except that Kubo was the most evil person I've ever met.

His wife doesn't know his secret, nor does anyone else in his family. Kubo swore an oath in 1945, at the end of the war, not to tell anyone what he saw and not to have any contact with his former army buddies, and he pretty much kept the promise over the decades. Ironically, he confided in me only because he wanted to convince me that Japan's army had not been as brutal as foreigners thought. He waited until his wife had left the room, and then he began his story.

"I joined the army when I was twelve years old, in 1937," he said. "I didn't question the war at all. Everything was done for emperor and country. I thought that the emperor was a living god." Kubo was sent to China to join Unit 731, and the officers gave Kubo a bit of medical training so that he could help with the experiments. These experiments were conducted on Chinese prisoners, mostly Communists, who were called *maruta*, or "logs." One of the first experiments that Kubo saw involved an outdoor test of the effectiveness of a lethal gas. It was conducted on an open plain, in the grain fields that seem to stretch forever in northeastern China, and the victims and the experimenters drove together to the site in trucks.

"The *maruta* were chained and tied with ropes to wooden stakes," Kubo recalled. "Some were in a crucifixion position, and others had their hands tied behind their backs. I wasn't told anything about them, but they were all men, and they seemed all young or in middle age and in good health. That was best for medical testing. Then we brought out a machine that was supposed to spew out poison gas, and we measured the distance from the machine to the prisoners, so that we could figure out how far away the gas would be effective. Our goal was to make fighting more efficient.

"We ran back and watched as the machine began to produce the poison

gas. But before anything happened, the wind suddenly changed—it sent the gas blowing in our direction. So we had to run for our lives, and I never did see what happened to those prisoners."

Kubo spent much of his time trying to contaminate Chinese cities with bubonic plague, and he also tried to infect rivers and wells with bacteriological agents to poison anybody in the area. At one point, he paused and frowned as he noticed that I seemed to be paying a good deal of attention to what he regarded as the peccadilloes of war. "When we threw germs into rivers and wells, they contaminated our water as well," Kubo said. "And what we did in Unit 731 was mostly academic study. I didn't see any torture or anything."

What kind of academic study?

"Well, we would infect *maruta* with the plague to see how long it would take them to die, to see how it would affect them. We wanted to understand better how we could use the plague germs against our enemies. Sometimes we would dissect the *maruta* after they had been infected, to study how the plague spread in their internal organs. Once the doctors let me take the first cut."

Kubo recalled that the *maruta* he cut was a Communist prisoner, thirty-four years old, who had been infected with the plague. The prisoner was brought in and tied naked to the operating table, facing up, and Kubo and the other Japanese approached him wearing gowns and face masks so that they would not get the disease. The prisoner was not anesthetized, and he looked silently at Kubo as preparations began for the first incision.

"It was the easiest part of the surgery, which is why they let me do it," Kubo said. "The fellow knew that it was over for him, and so he hadn't struggled when they led him into the room and tied him down. But when I picked up the scalpel, that's when he began screaming. I cut him open from the chest to the stomach, and he screamed terribly, and his face was all twisted in agony. He made this unimaginable sound, he was screaming so horribly. But then he finally stopped. He was unconscious."

Kubo paused and shook his head genially.

"This was all in a day's work for the surgeons," he added. "But it really left an impression on me, because it was my first time."

The atrocities that the Japanese army committed during World War II are well known, so what struck me was not so much Kubo's brutality back then as his lack of remorse today. Our conversation was at cross-purposes, because he had agreed to speak in the belief that a conversation would

make me realize that Unit 731 had not been so awful after all. We became increasingly frustrated with each other.

"Do you think that vivisection was wrong?" I asked. "Do you feel that what you did was immoral?"

"People do experiments on live bodies all the time," Kubo replied, looking injured. "Like heart transplants and other surgery, even though sometimes those experiments fail. And those doctors are paid so much money!"

"But transplants are meant to save lives, not destroy them. And those doctors use anesthesia."

"We couldn't use anesthesia. Vivisection should be done under normal circumstances. If we'd used anesthesia, that might have affected the body organs and blood vessels that we were examining. So we couldn't have used anesthetic."

"So you don't think you did anything wrong?"

Kubo shrugged impatiently, exasperated by my questioning. "People say that Unit 731 was brutal, and I can't say that they are wrong. But all this came to the surface only because we lost the war. If we had won, this would have been kept secret. And I think Unit 731 did some good things, because what we did in Unit 731 was mostly academic stuff. If we had won the war, all this would have been justified."

"But what about experiments on children? I read about a thirty-year-old Russian woman and her child. Unit 731 put them in a gas chamber with glass windows, and the soldiers clustered around to watch as the gas choked her, as she tried to save her child by lying on top of him. Is that justifiable?"

"Of course there were experiments on kids. But probably their fathers were spies."

I paused. His geniality had a harder edge now, and we were glaring indignantly at each other.

"Do you think this could ever happen again?" I asked.

"Yes, there's a chance this could happen again. Because in a war, you have to win."

I realized that Kubo is representative of Japan's dark side, its refusal to show contrition, its inability to face the past. But he is unusual not only in his wartime behavior but also in his obduracy. Polls show that Japanese believe two-to-one that their government has not done enough to apologize for the war or help the victims. Kubo and hard-liners like him linger, but they are slowly yielding ground and Japan is coming around.

Why is Japan so reluctant to confront its past? Apart from cultural explanations, such as a Confucian reluctance to speak ill of dead ancestors, there is an obvious reason: Countries, far more than individuals, hate to say that they are sorry. The United States, after all, has never formally apologized for enslaving Africans, invading Mexico and Canada, stealing Texas, colonizing the Philippines and Guam, or carpet-bombing Vietnam. Americans have conveniently forgotten the relish with which we slaughtered two hundred thousand Filipinos when they rebelled against our "liberation" a century ago. Take General Jacob "Hell-Roaring Jake" Smith, the military governor of the Philippine island of Samar. He ordered his troops to turn the entire island into "a howling wilderness" and specified that all males over the age of ten should be killed. "I want no prisoners," he declared. "I wish you to kill and burn; the more you kill and burn, the better you will please me." His men obliged, and the carnage was fantastic. On the main Philippine island of Luzon, a visiting American congressman said: "They never rebel in northern Luzon, because there isn't anybody there to rebel. The country was marched over and cleaned in a most resolute manner. The good Lord in heaven only knows the number of Filipinos that were put under the ground. Our soldiers took no prisoners, they kept no records; they simply swept the country, and wherever or whenever they could get hold of a Filipino they killed him."

One can argue that Americans have forgotten their atrocities in the Philippines because they occurred a century ago. But even in the case of World War II, Americans have almost no acquaintance with the brutality in which their own troops often engaged. The historian John Dower has gathered a series of horrifying accounts of Americans and Australians slaughtering wounded or surrendering Japanese and collecting grisly souvenirs such as teeth and ears—in one case, from a wounded Japanese man who thrashed about on the ground while a Marine cut his cheeks and yanked out his teeth. "The other night, Stanley emptied his pockets of 'souvenirs'—eleven ears from dead Japs," the Marines' *Leatherneck* journal reported in 1943. "It was not disgusting, as it would be from the civilian point of view." Charles Lindbergh, who accompanied American troops during the war, wrote in his diary that soldiers kicked in the teeth of Japanese prisoners, both before and after executing them. "It was freely admitted that some of our soldiers tortured Jap prisoners and were as cruel and

barbaric at times as the Japs themselves. Our men think nothing of shooting a Japanese prisoner or a soldier attempting to surrender."

My point is not that we were all just as bad as the Japanese troops, or even that people in glass houses should not throw stones.* The Japanese troops in World War II were particularly barbaric (just as the Japanese in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 were particularly gentlemanly). It is simply human nature to rationalize or forget our own sins and to home in on those of the other fellow. Japan's reluctance to face its past may be stupid and shortsighted and inexcusable, but it also is perfectly natural.

Moreover, most Japanese know very little of their country's dark past and thus are genuinely ignorant of what there is to repent. For decades, the Japanese government forced textbook publishers to excise any hint of the brutalities committed by the army. When one textbook writer referred to Japan's wartime "aggression," the Ministry of Education called for the sentence to be deleted, arguing that "in the interests of the education of citizens, it is not desirable to use a term with such negative implications to describe the acts of their own country. A term such as 'military advance' should be used instead of 'aggression.'"

Thanks to court intervention, the textbooks in recent years have become more honest and complete. The junior-high textbooks, for example, now mention Japanese "aggression," Unit 731, and the Rape of Nanjing (the massacre that unfolded after Japanese troops seized the Chinese city at the end of 1937). Moreover, Japanese scholars and journalists, who are disproportionately leftist, have increasingly been writing about the Rape of Nanjing, about the comfort women and other atrocities, and in fact the best research and most damning evidence of government complicity usually comes from Japanese scholars themselves. Far more, for example, is published in Japanese than in English about the Rape of Nanjing.

* I should also note that American troops were sometimes incredibly altruistic. In Okinawa, at different times I spoke to two elderly women who, as young girls, were both saved by American GIs who wrestled them to the ground to stop them from committing suicide. One of the girls had been in a cave where an entire village was hidden, but when the villagers were discovered they decided to commit suicide together. The American soldiers pleaded with them to give up, not to kill themselves, but the Japanese were sure they would be raped and tortured and murdered. So the mothers began killing their children. At that point, the American soldiers—at enormous risk to themselves—ran inside the cave and wrenched the knives and swords away from those who were killing themselves and their children. Many died, but the Americans saved about half of them. As I sat among the human bones in the darkness of that musty cave, which had been sealed and forgotten since that day, I felt an awe for those American veterans.



This photograph is said to show Japanese soldiers patrolling in Nanjing after the massacre of Chinese civilians there. The damage to the city is apparent in the buildings in the background.

There is another reason why Japan has difficulty confronting its historical responsibilities, and that is the overzealousness of certain Chinese and Koreans whose aim in examining history is not uncovering truth but rather humiliating Japan. Partly because they are playing to domestic audiences, Chinese and Korean leaders tend to exaggerate Japanese sins in the same way that Japanese leaders downplay them. And ordinary Japanese understandably see all the talk about history as a cynical exercise when Chinese officials seem less interested in what actually happened than in using the past to blackmail Japan into giving more aid. The Japanese, inflamed by the exaggerations, become resentful and defensive, and the cycle of recriminations continues. To break this spiral, each country must look at history as something more than simply a debating platform to score points. History is invariably too muddled and uncertain for that. For instance, the Rape of Nanjing is the single greatest Japanese atrocity abroad, and the one that is most often raised by Chinese and Westerners alike. But it is also an example of how history tends to be written by polemicists rather than impartial scholars.

China regularly claims that there were three hundred thousand fatalities and sometimes offers a death count as high as six hundred thousand. Iris Chang, a Chinese-American, has written a book about the massacre in which she concludes that between 260,000 and 350,000 people were killed. She also writes about victims being nailed to walls, hung by their tongues from iron hooks, or buried in the ground to their waists and then torn apart by German shepherds. Japanese rightists such as Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara, on the other hand, claim that the Rape of Nanjing never happened.

A close look shows that both sides rely on dubious witnesses and evidence, and in that sense the Rape of Nanjing is a useful window into historiography as an international competition. The Japanese rightists are clearly wrong when they say that there was no massacre, but likewise there is little basis for the assertions that hundreds of thousands died. Just as some Japanese have tried to cover up the massacres, so some Chinese have fiddled with Nanjing to try to make it even more horrifying than it really was.

What is clear is that Japanese troops rampaged through Nanjing, butchering any young men they found. The soldiers forced their way into homes, gang-raping women and girls and beheading any brothers or fathers who protested. Girls were often killed or mutilated after being raped, and entire families were roasted alive. This slaughter and torture and rape went on for eight weeks, and the Japanese seizure of Nanjing was perhaps the most barbaric capture of any city in modern times. John Rabe, a German civilian who witnessed the slaughter and saved many lives, recorded the brutality in his diary. "You can't breathe for sheer revulsion when you keep finding the bodies of women with bamboo poles thrust up their vaginas," he wrote. "Even old women over seventy are constantly being raped."

The question of how many people were killed is deeply uncertain. Rabe, as the head of the safety zone in Nanjing, was in the center of the action and had information from his network of Chinese friends and assistants, but although his diary recounts terrible brutality and killing, there is nothing about tongues or German shepherds. Back in Germany months afterward, he wrote: "According to Chinese claims, 100,000 civilians were killed; this, however, is probably something of an overstatement. We Europeans put the number at about 50,000 to 60,000." Other early estimates by witnesses were in the same ballpark. Miner Searle Bates, a history professor in Nanjing and a member of the safety zone committee, said in Jan-

uary 1938 that forty thousand had been killed, including twelve thousand civilians and the rest soldiers. In February 1938, a Chinese delegate to the United Nations put the figure at twenty thousand civilians. The Chinese Red Army newspaper reported on April 30, 1938, that the total death toll was 42,000. These estimates have been justly criticized, however, as based on early, incomplete evidence, possibly before the full toll in outlying rural areas became known.

The higher estimates, by Chinese commentators or by the War Crimes Tribunal in Tokyo, of hundreds of thousands of deaths, are totals of various figures. For starters, they include reports by supposed eyewitnesses such as Lu Su, who claimed that on December 18 he hid in a cave and saw 57,418 Chinese men and women bayoneted and machine-gunned by Japanese troops. There is no explanation for how he counted the precise number, and no accounting for how he saw the massacre if he was hiding in a cave. When all these "eyewitness" accounts of various killings are added together, the total number of people said to be slaughtered in these massacres is 190,000.

Massacres did take place on a huge scale—Japanese diaries confirm that—but the problem is that eyewitnesses like Lu Su often lie. Major Hisao Ohta, a Japanese officer in Nanjing, is often cited for his confession that his soldiers dumped the bodies of 150,000 Chinese victims into the Nanjing River between December 15 and December 17, 1937. Any such confession should be suspect because it was made when he was in a Chinese prison camp, and sure enough, it turns out that Major Ohta was not even assigned to go to Nanjing until December 25, 1937, a week after the killings he "witnessed." Most of the eyewitness reports of Nanjing barbarism are, of course, from Chinese survivors, and they also need to be treated with skepticism. Communist rule produced all kinds of witnesses, and indeed during the Korean War the Chinese cited eyewitness reports that Americans had participated jointly with the Japanese in the Rape of Nanjing. But even if the government had not been whipping up campaigns against Japan, there is something very human about exaggerating genuine horrors. That is why the death tolls based on eyewitness claims usually come down dramatically when investigators get access to an area: In Romania in 1989, the first gory reports were that sixty thousand demonstrators had been massacred in Timișoara by the collapsing Communist regime, but that figure later fell to fewer than one thousand, and in Kosovo in 1999, the U.S. State Department initially suggested that one hundred thousand Albanians might have been killed, but later estimates

dropped to a few thousand. I encountered this psychology at the time of the Tiananmen killings in 1989, when there were witnesses who vividly described massacre scenes that had never occurred and insisted that the death toll was in the thousands or tens of thousands. I heard people recounting how they had seen Tiananmen Square knee-deep in blood and guts where tanks had rolled across fleeing students; since I was one of the last to flee the square, gunfire all around me, I knew these were exaggerations. Hundreds were killed, and as I remember my rage I can understand how people could exaggerate in those circumstances. But it did no honor to the dead to give credence to the wilder claims.

Particularly in Nanjing, where the government encouraged the emergence of professional victims who would recount their anti-Japanese tales to promote Chinese nationalism, and where it was in people's interest to exaggerate, we need to be wary of the resulting accounts. We need to be skeptical of victims as well as war criminals.

Then there are Nanjing's burial claims, in which two charitable groups said that they buried 155,000 people. But the figures invite doubt because 105,000 of those burials are attributed to a little-known group called Cunshandang in just a three-week period in April. Cunshandang previously had buried only 75 bodies a day, so it is difficult to see how it suddenly took on another 105,000 burials, or 5,000 a day, after the Rape of Nanjing was mostly over. In any case, some scholars believe that Cunshandang was subcontracting for the Red Swastika Society and that its burials were included in the Red Swastika Society's figure of a total of 43,000 burials, including natural deaths.

Another approach to the death toll was provided by Professor Lewis S.C. Smythe of Nanjing University, who conducted a survey in the spring of 1938 of one in every fifty households in Nanjing and one in ten in the surrounding countryside. Smythe's report concluded that about 29,400 people had been killed, mostly outside of Nanjing itself.

So in reality how many people were killed in Nanjing? The answer is simply that we don't know. But we need to distinguish between combat deaths and those of deserters and civilians. My own guesswork is that tens of thousands of Chinese soldiers died in combat and tens of thousands more after they had surrendered, fled, or been taken prisoner, in violation of international law. In addition, many, many thousands of civilians were slaughtered. I can't exclude the possibility that the highest figures are correct, but it seems to me more reasonable that the total death toll is near

Rabe's estimate of fifty thousand to sixty thousand, or Miner Searle Bates's of forty thousand, or the initial Communist Chinese estimate of forty thousand.

I have detoured into this minefield to try to show that these historical disputes are often far more complex than they seem at first, and that while Japan is responsible for its failure to apologize adequately and confront its brutality, other countries also need to act responsibly. It may seem churlish to complain about Chinese exaggerations of the Rape of Nanjing, when there is no doubt that it was one of the worst atrocities of the war and that the suffering was incalculable. But when China inflates numbers of victims to try to intensify Japanese guilt, then this stokes not guilt but anger. On all sides, history should be written with pens rather than cudgels.

Most of the responsibility for facing the past must, of course, go to Japan. But as Kim Dae Jung has acknowledged, some must also go to China and Korea and other countries. China needs to realize that while the Japanese army killed millions of Chinese, Mao killed tens of millions. Koreans need to accept that while Japan's annexation of the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945 was ruthless, it led to the vast expansion of roads, railroads, and modern schools, so that by 1945 Korea had half as many miles of roads as China. While nothing makes Koreans angrier—quite justifiably—than Japan's refusal to compensate the comfort women, it was Koreans themselves who, under coercion, seized teenage girls and handed them over to the occupiers. Moreover, Koreans and Chinese alike need to acknowledge that however awful Japan was in the war, exceedingly few Japanese alive today ever bayoneted babies or raped girls in Nanjing.

There is a more fundamental reason for Japan's difficulties acknowledging war guilt, and it has to do with Miyoko Inoue and all that she represents. Miyoko, a fourteen-year-old girl, was near ground zero at 8:15 a.m. on August 6, 1945, when the United States dropped the atomic bomb over Hiroshima. At that precise moment, Miyoko ceased to exist. She was not simply killed; she was vaporized. The only trace remaining behind was an impression of a foot in her left shoe. Her skin, her clothes, her bones, her blood, her other shoe—they were all atomized. The shoe is now in the Hiroshima Peace Museum, a long white building set in a beautiful green park at the epicenter of the bombing. The museum is a monument to the

horrors of the atomic bombing, noted by the hundreds of thousands of schoolchildren who file through with wide-open eyes and then leave comments in the guest book like "How can human beings do this?"

The Hiroshima bombing was a tragedy not only for the likes of Miyoko but for the region, for it nurtured a sense among Japanese of themselves as victims of the war rather than its cause. In Japan, there is a nearly universal feeling that the United States was wrong, and probably racist, to drop the bombs, and this view has also spread in the West. The perception that Japan is a victim of the war has made it more difficult for Japanese to accept that they have a responsibility to apologize to or compensate their victims.

The atomic bombing is such a fundamental part of this equation—it is impossible to understand Japan today without reference to it—that it is worth a closer look even now. I arrived in Japan thinking that the bombing was a mistake, but I gradually changed my mind and concluded that it ended up saving lives of Japanese and Americans alike. What changed my feelings was my research into wartime Japanese decision-making, based on recent Japanese scholarship and newly released Japanese documents.

The minutes of cabinet meetings and other sessions show that the Japanese army was absolutely determined not to surrender but to fight on to the last man—to the last baby, for that matter. "Sacrifice twenty million Japanese lives," a senior navy official urged in one meeting, proposing a massive suicide attack on the Allies. The documents suggest that Japan would not have surrendered just because it was losing or just because Russia entered the war. Indeed, even after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Army Minister Korechika Anami insisted on fighting to the end. "The appearance of the atomic bomb does not spell the end of the war," he insisted at a cabinet meeting on August 9, 1945. "We are confident about the decisive battle in the homeland against American forces." At another point, he told the meeting: "I am quite sure we could inflict great casualties on the enemy, and even if we fail in the attempt, our hundred million people are ready to die for honor." Anami suggested hopefully that perhaps the Americans had built only one atomic bomb—and just then a messenger arrived in the room with the news that an atomic bomb had been dropped on Nagasaki as well.

The Japanese archives show that one of the great heroes of World War II was Marcus McDilda, an American fighter pilot shot down on August 8, 1945. He was beaten up, tortured, and quizzed repeatedly as to what he knew about the atomic bomb. McDilda knew nothing and said so. A gen-

eral arrived, brandished a sword, and slashed McDilda's lip, saying he would personally cut off McDilda's head unless he spilled everything he knew about the atomic bomb. And so McDilda, his lip bleeding, his bruises throbbing, began to lie. McDilda said that the atomic bomb measured twenty-four feet by thirty-six feet and he explained how it worked: "As you know, when atoms are split, there are a lot of plusses and minuses released. Well, we've taken these and put them in a huge container and separated them from each other with a lead shield. When the box is dropped out of a plane, we melt the lead shield and the plusses and minuses come together." McDilda added that America had one hundred of these atomic bombs prepared for use. Asked about future targets, he replied, "I believe Tokyo is supposed to be bombed in the next few days."

The interrogators rushed off to call the headquarters in Tokyo, and Anami reluctantly advised the cabinet that America had one hundred more atomic bombs and that Tokyo was the next target, possibly on August 12. This dampened spirits in the cabinet room, but, incredibly, even then Anami and the generals insisted that there could be no surrender.

In reading the documents of those meetings, one gets the sense that the diehard army elements almost succeeded in forcing the war on to an endless ground battle on the main Japanese islands. Even after the two atomic bombings, even after Russia entered the war, even after the emperor intervened and demanded a surrender, hard-line elements tried a mutiny so that they could keep fighting and prevent the emperor's surrender announcement from being broadcast. The mutiny failed, but it was a close call. Without the two atomic bombings, or at least the one in Hiroshima, the "peace faction" would never have convinced the Japanese decision-makers to surrender. Koichi Kido, then the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal and one of the staunch advocates of making peace, said later that those in favor of surrender "were assisted by the atomic bomb in our endeavor to end the war." Kido added: "The feeling that the Emperor and I had about the atomic bombing was that the psychological moment we had long waited for had finally arrived to resolutely carry out the termination of the war. . . . We felt that if we took the occasion and utilized the psychological shock of the bomb to carry through, we might perhaps succeed in ending the war." Likewise, Navy Minister Mitsumasa Yonai, another advocate of surrender, called the atomic bombs "providential help," and the prime minister at the time, Kantaro Suzuki, later called the bombing "an extremely favorable opportunity." The advocates of peace used the atomic bombs to help the army save face, by suggesting that

Japan had not been defeated by Allied armies but by “science”—something beyond its control. This gave an excuse for the army to back down. “The atomic bomb was a golden opportunity given by heaven for Japan to end the war,” explained Hisatsune Sakomizu, the chief cabinet secretary at the time.

In the battle over the small, sparsely populated islands of Okinawa, fourteen thousand Americans and two hundred thousand Japanese were killed. If the fighting had reached the main islands of Japan, millions of Japanese would have been killed. So in that context, it seems to me that nothing saved so many Japanese lives as the dropping of the atomic bombs. Far from being victimized by the bombs, Japan was rescued by them.

Why is East Asia now beginning to face up to the past? What has changed?

With the ending of the Cold War, Asians became people instead of Communists and capitalists. South Koreans, Americans, and Chinese alike increasingly began to demand that Japan confront its history. And ordinary Japanese themselves began to do the same. Gradually, Japanese politicians began to express more sincere statements of regret for World War II, culminating in Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama’s heartfelt apology on the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war. No subsequent prime minister has spoken from the heart in the same way, but they have at least echoed the language.

More mature leaders have also emerged in other countries, most notably Kim Dae Jung in South Korea. Nowhere is Kim’s statesmanship more evident than in his handling of history. One of his greatest moments was his state visit to Japan in 1998, when he spoke to the Japanese parliament and candidly emphasized the “doubts and mistrust” throughout Asia about Japan but also emphasized the need to move on. “Japan needs true courage to look at the past squarely and respect the judgment of history,” he declared, but he added: “South Korea should also rightly evaluate Japan, in all its changed aspects, and search with hope for future possibilities.” Kim announced that he was ending the ban on imports from Japan, and he emphasized Korea’s readiness to work with Japan to build a better relationship. There was an outpouring of warmth from the Japanese, and Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi responded with an unusually forthright apology for the war. That visit was a model of how two countries can overcome the past and move forward.



Teruichi Ukita chats about his wartime memories, saying that he terribly regrets what he did—without quite saying what it was that he did.

The visit gives me hope because it demonstrates that this fog of recalcitrance may slowly be burning off, laying the groundwork for stronger economic cooperation and progress. I saw similar signs of maturity in many of the ordinary people I talked to, especially in Japan, Korea, and China, people like Teruichi Ukita, one of the old men of Omiya. Ukita, seventy-one, is a burly fellow with a crown of white hair shorn in a crew cut. We sat down on folding chairs in a community center, our arms on the table, and we chatted for a bit to take the measure of one another. He spoke gruffly, without the polite suffixes that a Japanese normally uses in conversation with a stranger, but this was not rudeness so much as his simple, straightforward manner. It was a wet, cold, winter day, but even as the rain tumbled down outside, the room was warm and cozy, and Ukita was friendly and hospitable.

He used a thick wooden spear to carve up an *okashi*, a delicate Japanese cake, and matter-of-factly acknowledged that he had served in China in the *Kenpeitai*, the dreaded military police. Records confirmed that. He confessed that he had killed many Chinese during the war, but he refused to provide any details. “I saw lots of torture scenes, but I don’t want to talk

about it or remember it," Ukita said bluntly. "It was said that even crying babies would shut up at the mention of the *Kenpeitai*. Everybody was afraid of us. The word was that prisoners would enter by the front gate but leave by the back gate—as corpses."

It seemed that Ukita himself had tortured prisoners, although he would not directly say so, and I asked what the torturers were like.

"They were just regular people doing their job. But there were two kinds of torturers. You've got to understand the difference." He paused and looked me keenly in the eye. "There were torturers who were cold, and there were torturers who were humane. That was the big difference. You understand that?"

"Not really. What's the difference between a cold torturer and a humane one?"

"A cold torturer," Ukita began, but he broke off, searching for a way to explain to me. After a long silence, he spoke up again: "If you look in a man's eyes as you torture him, then you understand him. When you ask him for information, you can tell from his eyes if he's telling the truth when he says, 'I don't know, I don't know.' The humane torturers would stop at that point, if they saw the man really didn't know. The cold ones would keep going."

His voice was quavering, and I quietly asked about the victims.

"Most of them were men, young men," he said. "But I remember some women as well. I remember. . ." He paused, and he seemed on the verge of breaking down.

"Look, this is really unpleasant for me to remember," he said shakily. "I hate to think about it. I just can't talk about it."

It was only when Japan lost the war that he began to think about what he had done, he said. Ukita was captured by Russians and sent to a labor camp in Siberia, along with hundreds of thousands of other Japanese, and it was there, when he saw Russians casually killing his fellow Japanese, that he belatedly realized the universality of humanity. "Watching Chinese being killed, I had no emotions," Ukita said heavily. "It was like a game. But when I saw Japanese being executed in Siberia for stealing things, I got so angry and emotional."

"What about comfort women?" I asked. "Did you see any of them?"

"Oh, yeah, I often visited them. Now some Japanese say that they were volunteers, but I know from my experience that they were forced to work in the brothels. They weren't volunteers; they were kidnapped. I talked to them. I know it."

At this point, Ukita's voice choked, and he blinked back tears. "At the time of the war, I was in my twenties and single, and I didn't understand," he said, his voice breaking. "But when I had two daughters myself, I started to realize what I had done."

"But what exactly did you do?"

Ukita choked again, and ran his hand across his face. "I can't say," he said tremulously. "But Japan is wrong, absolutely wrong, to refuse to pay those girls official compensation. They are right and we are in the wrong. We should pay them for all the injuries we have done them."

He looked up. "War makes people do terrible things," he said in a broken voice, by way of apology. "Humans are so stupid. You do terrible things, and you regret them later. At first, humans seem so smart. And in reality, they're such idiots."

Most veterans are like Ukita, remorseful for what they have done, and so a historical restructuring is beginning to accompany the political and economic change. But the pace is too slow, and until the historical disputes are buried they will inflame nationalists and threaten the well-being of Asia. Yuko Tojo, the dragon lady in Tokyo, is a good example of these nationalists waiting in the wings.