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Challenges of Trans-National History: Historians and the Nanjing Atrocity

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Reckoning the Past

The Nanjing Atrocity, also known as the Rape of Nanking or the Nanjing Massacre, is a symbol of East Asia's "unmastered past." [1] The massive killing, raping, and other brutal acts committed by the Japanese troops in the former Chinese capital of Nanjing in the winter of 1937-1938 have stirred up much emotion and controversy in recent years. Nearly 84 percent of some 100,000 Chinese surveyed in 1996 chose the "Nanjing Massacre" when asked what they associate most with Japan. [2] The first major account of the subject in English, by Chinese-American free-lance writer Iris Chang, became a runaway bestseller in the United States and was subsequently published in Chinese. In Japan, where a so-called "debate over the Nanjing Incident" has been raging for decades, Chang's book has been angrily denounced by some as "anti-Japanese and spurious." [3]

A historical controversy like this has had important implications for international affairs in East Asia. Over the last decade or so, issues related to the Japanese colonial past and wartime transgressions in Asia periodically erupted into diplomatic incidents between Japan and its neighbors. For example, when Japan's minister of justice called the Nanjing Massacre a "fabrication" in 1994, waves of protest from China and Korea eventually brought about his resignation. When Japan's ambassador to the United States characterized Chang's book as "inaccurate," "erroneous," and "distorted," the Chinese government spokesman responded angrily that "to correctly understand and treat the history regarding the aggression of China by Japanese militarists constitutes an important political foundation for the Sino-Japanese ties." [4] Differences over **[End Page 133]** the issue of proper apologies for Japan's invasion of China also overshadowed the important visit to Japan by Chinese President Jiang Zemin in October 1998. Given the widely recognized "gaps" in historical understanding between Japan and its Asian neighbors over issues related to World War II, as one American current affairs analyst has pointed out, any new confidence-building initiative in the region will be predicated on

addressing issues from the past. [5]

The ongoing controversy over the Nanjing Atrocity raises an important question for the public at large and practicing historians in particular: is a trans-national history based upon a shared historical understanding still possible? Needless to say, national boundaries are seldom the only fault lines to cross to accomplish such a formidable task. All too often, as in the case of postwar Japan, historians within the same society are bitterly divided on issues related to its past. Many societies today are undergoing the process of reckoning with a problematic national past after the collapse of totalitarian regimes. From South Africa to Argentina to Eastern Europe, truth, justice, and reconciliation have become high priorities on the national political agenda.

Nevertheless, it is perhaps in the realm of international politics that the need for a common historical understanding runs into its most difficult obstacle. To start, not everyone is wholly convinced of the merits of a trans-national history. Some are opposed to the idea on the grounds that it undermines a nation-centered narrative, and thus is injurious to national pride and national identity. In Japan, once considered by many as the model of post-industrial society, a vocal segment of intellectual circles is calling for historical education to instill the "pride of Japan" among the country's younger generation. Tokyo University professor Fujioka Nobukatsu, a leading champion of this movement, sees little benefit in sharing a view of Japanese history with other countries. Instead, Fujioka and his followers are calling for a Japan-centered perspective in historical education to replace what he terms "historical views of Japan based on the interests of foreign countries" or former enemy countries. Any Japanese who strives to reveal Japan's war crimes in Asia or the darker side of its past is considered "masochistic," while non-Japanese who do so are branded as "anti-Japanese." [6] In China, although the universality of historical materialism still has some popularity among historians, the government **[End Page 134]** has also been using historical education to strengthen patriotic feelings among its citizens. Since its opening in 1985, the Memorial of Victims of the Nanjing Atrocity has been designated as one of the "Sites of Patriotic Education" in China. One is told in lessons from the Japanese atrocities in Nanjing that "backwardness invites bullying" and "if the country is not strong, its people suffer." The national orientation is quite clear. [7] Tendencies toward nation-centered histories are going strong in China and in certain quarters in Japan as well.

Such tendencies are by no means unique to these two countries. If the modern nation is thought of as an imagined community, some would argue, then history and collective memory are essential to the formation and maintenance of national identity. It is therefore impossible for two different nations to share such a vital property. The end of the Cold War has altered the old ideological battlefronts that dominated the postwar international political landscape. It has also created or reinforced non-ideological lines of allegiance. Universalistic views of the history of human interaction have been further eroded by intensifying ethnic conflicts. In fact, this very phenomenon is a timely and somber reminder that an historical understanding that transcends national boundaries is all the more important. It is in this context that historians,

commonly considered as custodians of the past, must be assertive and become involved. Indeed, some observers have suggested that controversial issues such as the Nanjing Atrocity should be left to historians to find the truth.

Can Historians Rise to the Challenge?

In fact, while many may agree that a trans-national history is desirable, some historians find it a noble ideal that is impossible in practice. At the beginning of this century, British historian Lord Acton could confidently declare that "our [history of] Waterloo must be one that satisfies French and English, German and Dutch alike," so that "nobody can tell, without examining the list of authors where Bishop of Oxford laid down pen, and whether Fairbairn or Gasquet, Liebermann or Harrison took up." [8] The prevailing view among Western historians seems less sanguine today, especially as they look beyond Western Europe. Within the Western historical profession, with the declining popularity of positivism over the past several decades, the Enlightenment idea of objective Truth based on scientific research is now regarded as a mere "noble dream." [9] As extreme relativism would go, everyone is entitled to his or her own truth. [10]

Historians, especially those practicing in the field of **[End Page 135]** international history, need not despair. Eliminating all differences in historical perspectives to create a uniform view of the past for all groups is indeed impossible. Nor is such a practice desirable. What is possible and even sometimes necessary, however, is to construct a common framework of interpretation in order to understand a shared past, even if countries experienced the past in drastically different ways. Such an interpretative framework must be firmly grounded in the unrelenting quest for historical truth without succumbing to naive positivism; it should also be sensitive to its moral-ethical implications, at both the particular and universal levels. In other words, historians cannot speak of an historical understanding if there is no regard for the rules of evidence and analysis, nor can they achieve a common understanding that transcends national borders without addressing both particular and universal perspectives.

A history of war and atrocities belongs neither to perpetrators nor victims solely. The Nanjing Atrocity, an important event in the annals of both modern Chinese and Japanese history, is an appropriate example of how such an interpretative framework may help foster a trans-national historical understanding. The unresolved polarization of the current controversy on both sides of the Pacific, I would argue, is in part due to the fact that the majority of existing interpretations of the Nanjing Atrocity have, for the most part, failed to incorporate all the necessary dimensions.

Telling the Truth about History

As an historical event, the Nanjing Atrocity took place at a particular time in the past, under a particular set of historical circumstances. Unlike a fictional event, it was both real and definite. This simple characterization may appear rather obvious, but the implications are nevertheless crucial, for historians can only

know the past through reconstruction based on historical evidence.

Historians need to remember that uncovering facts during historical inquiry has never been an unproblematic process. Not all historical events leave records behind, especially in written form. Sometimes no evidence remains, either because of the passage of time or deliberate destruction. Furthermore, there may be considerable dispute over what constitutes reliable evidence, since, to a certain degree, all historical documents are human creations. Therefore, historical evidence can be as illuminating as it can be limiting. This condition should not lead to the abandonment of the empirical approach to historical inquiry. On the contrary, it highlights the importance of historical methodology **[End Page 136]** and calls for the sharpening of an historian's own craft. Thus, historical inquiry should be the combined study of actual events and how they were passed down to us. [11] Three issues--historical evidence, memory, and revisionism--deserve some elaboration, as they are particularly pertinent in the debate over the Nanjing Atrocity.

First, to understand what actually happened and how it occurred in Nanjing sixty years ago, there is no substitute for meticulous historical research. Faithfully accounting for every bit of the historical particularities is no easy task, but failure to do so has grave implications. It is not uncommon to justify using a photograph of a Japanese atrocity in another part of China as an exhibit on the Nanjing Atrocity, since the message about the brutality of Japanese aggression seems to be the same. However, such a practice invites a danger of abusing historical evidence. This is especially dangerous as it has become a preoccupation of some to expose the technical discrepancies in existing accounts of the Japanese atrocities in Nanjing, however minor they may be, and immediately claim, explicitly or implicitly, that the entire incident was "made up." The numerous errors found in Iris Chang's popular book on the Nanjing Atrocity, not surprisingly, have become a favorite target for nationalists in Japan. Such a reaction suggests that anyone writing a history of the Nanjing Atrocity, professional historian or otherwise, must be prepared to meet the strictest criteria possible.

Second, given the circumstances of the atrocity in Nanjing, most of the evidence collected in China after the war, as well as in Japan, was reminiscences. The Japanese were confronted with Chinese survivors' accounts for the first time following the publication of Honda Katsuichi's interviews in China in 1971. Later, a number of former Japanese soldiers came forward to bear witness or to tell of their own participation. These testimonies by direct participants constitute an important dimension of the event in itself, how it was experienced and remembered. But historians also face the question of how to evaluate memory as credible historical evidence. In the absence of written or other forms of evidence, reminiscences are in some cases the only way to uncover what happened. [12] Lacking a consensus on this subject, many psychologists have found memory not only quite resilient after years of repression, but also subject to willful and unconscious distortion. Historian Michael Kammen notes that not all distortions are cynical in nature and further emphasizes that distortion or even manipulation does not always, or inevitably, occur for cynical or hypocritical reasons. [13] While historians should use

testimonies in reconstructing events like the Nanjing Atrocity, they cannot afford to do so uncritically. James E. Young, who has written extensively on Holocaust commemorations, calls for an integration of **[End Page 137]** "the factual truths of the historian's narrative and the contingent truths of the victims' memory." In this way, he suggests, "no single, overarching meaning emerges unchallenged; instead, narrative and counter-narrative generate a frisson of meaning in their exchange, in the working through process they now mutually reinforce." [14]

Finally, understanding an historical event is rarely static, although memory and commemoration demand stable symbols. Historians must be prepared to revise earlier assumptions and hypotheses, especially in the face of new, credible evidence. Moreover, since interpretation is also part of historical inquiry, the meanings of past events are even less constant. In the public media, however, the term "revisionism" is usually associated only with those who seek to deny or minimize both Japan's atrocities in Nanjing and its aggression generally. Such use may be convenient considering the self-proclaimed missions of these writers, but it is nonetheless misleading, since critical and scrupulous revision is the lifeblood of historical reflection and inquiry. Even with regard to the Holocaust, one American historian has noted that, "after fifty years the question is no longer whether or not to reappraise and historicize...but rather how to do so responsibly." [15] There has been a tendency among Chinese writers to consider previous conclusions (or war crimes trial verdicts) on the Nanjing Atrocity as iron-clad historical facts, off limits to any re-appraisal. This may be an understandable reaction to attempts, both real and perceived, to "whitewash" Japan's war crimes in history. From a historiographical point of view, however, the Nanjing Atrocity, as well as the postwar war crimes trials' verdicts, need to be reexamined in light of new evidence just as any other event in history. Only by reconstructing past events on the basis of solid evidence can one best protect historical truths from their real assailants.

Ultimately, the Nanjing Atrocity cannot be reduced to a body of incontrovertible facts, unless historians are referring to such statements as "Nanjing was the capital of China in 1937." Such "facts" on their own quite simply allow no interpretation and thus add no meaning to the event at all. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, historical facts can't speak for themselves; historians do. As historians make sense of the past, they must also take into consideration the moral and ethical implications of their subject.

Making Sense of the Past

Writing history, especially a history of war and atrocities, has moral and ethical implications. Even if there is value-free science, there is no such **[End Page 138]** thing as value-free historiography. All good historians strive to be fair, but they cannot be completely impartial on issues like war atrocities. As one British historian has stated in somewhat alarming terms, if historians shun all the moral aspects and write "objective" or non-moral history, "the best intention of historians may result in what they would not desire; namely, a slide from a non-moral attitude in historians to attitudes in their readers that are, first,

amoral, and then, perhaps, immoral." [16] In his book on the "historians' debate" over the Nazi Holocaust in former West Germany, historian Charles Maier has reminded us that "[historical] interpretations must simultaneously be political interpretations in that they support some beliefs about how power works and dismiss others. But they need not be politicized interpretations; they need not be weapons forged for a current ideological contest." [17]

This is an important insight because a full understanding of the Nanjing Atrocity requires us to go beyond simply uncovering facts to consider the moral-ethical dimensions of the event. To do this properly, I emphasize that historians should approach the subject at both the particular and universal levels.

At the particular level, the distinction between victims and perpetrators is not only necessary, but also indispensable to our understanding of the Nanjing Atrocity itself and its postwar repercussions. Imperfect as these designations may be due to our own political positions, failure to make such a distinction amounts to injustice and has grave consequences. In this sense, there is always going to be a political aspect to the continuing discourse on the Nanjing Atrocity as long as the term "aggression" remains a relevant concept in international affairs. To the extent that the atrocities in Nanjing took place during the military conflict between Japan and China, and that neither of these nation-states has withered away since the war, the national perspective cannot be entirely discarded. Whereas it would be wrong to consider perpetrators and victims as fixed designations or solely at the national level, it is unrealistic to ignore the national framework completely in discussing the lingering repercussions of the Nanjing Atrocity today.

First of all, it is worth remembering that the event known as the Nanjing Atrocity took place in the context of Japan's military invasion of China. The kinds of brutality, wanton killing, raping, and looting, could not be completely separated from the war of aggression Japan waged against its neighbor. Insofar as national consciousness affected actors in the historical event, it needs to be studied in its own right. In other words, a sense of Japanese superiority and contempt for other Asians influenced Japanese wartime behavior and must be taken into consideration. Taken out of the context of Japan's aggression, **[End Page 139]** the Nanjing Atrocity would become a mere accident, as claimed by many apologists in Japan. It is in this sense that the Nanjing Atrocity has appropriately become a symbol of Japanese brutalities during the entire Asian-Pacific war.

Second, and perhaps more importantly for historians, the perpetrator-victim distinction has implications for the evidence upon which they reconstruct history. It would be too naive to believe that the field of historical discovery is ever a neutral playground. In the case of war and its atrocities, the nature of written evidence tends to privilege the powerful and disfavor the vanquished. That perpetrators tend to conceal any incriminating evidence is hardly a novel idea. There were good reasons why the wartime Japanese authorities exercised strict control over both foreign correspondents and their own writers at home. Japan's prize-winning writer Ishikawa Tatsuzô, on the other hand, was given a four-month sentence for writing a work of fiction containing

references to brutal killings by the Japanese in the Nanjing area. The April 1938 issue of the monthly journal *Chûô Kôron*, which published a sanitized version of his novel, was immediately withdrawn. [18] Incriminating evidence at the scene of the atrocities was either destroyed or suppressed. Bodies of killed Chinese captives were either burnt or thrown into the river, so that there would be no traces of the massacre. At the lowest level, it was common for Japanese soldiers to kill their rape victims so that they could not live to bear witness to their crimes.

Third, moral judgments continue to influence how evidence is produced, or if it will be produced at all, even after the war. As Japanese historian Hata Ikuhiko pointed out in his well-researched book on the Nanjing Atrocity, those who believed they were guilty tended to keep quiet while those who believed in their innocence spoke out. Even those who admitted guilt would talk about killing POWs or looting, with scarcely anyone admitting to raping or killing rape victims. [19] Another writer working on the subject recounted a Japanese captain who recorded the details of critical events in Nanjing in his diary, but insisted on taking his dairy with him to his grave. [20] Even the indefatigable factory worker, Ono Kenji, who discovered the wartime diaries of many former soldiers, has faced a measure of resistance from some who have refused to release the information to him. At the same time, there is still much social pressure against the few Japanese soldiers who came forward to tell their story of the event. They were often derogatorily dubbed as "*zange-ya*" (habitual confessors), or their personal safety was threatened.

Finally, the victim-perpetrator dichotomy continues to affect **[End Page 140]** post-traumatic experiences, which is becoming a subject of study in its own right. "The obligations of memory thus remain asymmetrical," Charles Maier stated succinctly in discussing Jewish-German relations, "[T]he appropriateness of each position depends on who utters it." [21] Many Japanese do consider the moral implications of an atrocity like Nanjing, but only in a universalistic way to the extent that perpetrators and victims became indistinguishable. Many Japanese ex-soldiers who testified to the atrocity in Nanjing placed the blame on the war. As former Sergeant Ide Junji, who recalled brutal killings in Nanjing by the Japanese troops, put it, "human beings are capable of being god and demon. It is war that induces human beings to become demons." [22] There is certainly truth in such a statement. Moreover, sentiments like this may well be genuine and may have contributed to the strong pacifism in postwar Japan. However, placing total blame on the war is at best inadequate and at worst an escape from accepting responsibility because war does not itself kill or rape, humans do. Acknowledgment of the dehumanizing impact of war can not replace an analysis of the responsibilities of individuals as well as of the institutions these individuals have created. Without acknowledging the human agency for atrocities, however, the claim to universal mercy rings hollow, and the implied apology insincere, to the victims.

Indispensable as it is, the distinction between perpetrator and victim is often far from absolute. Simplifying a multifaceted historical event into a simple black-and-white analysis is inadequate for understanding the historical process, which necessarily includes shades of gray. For instance, the fact that

not a few Chinese collaborators assisted Japanese troops in separating Chinese soldiers from civilians in the Safety Zone in Nanjing demonstrates that the perpetrator-victim distinction is not always drawn along purely national lines. Such a distinction does not explain sufficiently why the atrocity took place as it did. Although most Chinese studies of the Nanjing Atrocity have placed the responsibility squarely on the Japanese side, recent Chinese work argues that General Tang Shengzhi's failure to bring about an orderly retreat was a major factor contributing to the massive loss of lives, just as Chinese resistance has intensified Japanese revenge. [23] On the other hand, the institutionalization of terror by the Japanese military against its own soldiers who surrendered contributed decisively to Japanese brutality against Chinese captives in Nanjing. [24] Indeed, an understanding of the Nanjing Atrocity and its implications would not be complete if one simply condemns it as only the product of Japanese militarism against the Chinese. **[End Page 141]**

Moreover, drawing such a distinction between perpetrator and victim in a specific event does not automatically make such status absolute or eternal. There is always a risk in equating these categories with an entire people or nation. Necessary as it may be, politically determined ethical yardsticks are not the final criteria for judging events such as the Nanjing Atrocity in human history. The ultimate moral judgment must be anchored in a common ideal of humanity. In this sense, the Nanjing Atrocity is not simply a Japanese atrocity against the Chinese, but a human catastrophe. It took place in a brutalized war (though still an undeclared one), fanned by ethnic hatred and contempt for the inferior "Other," and sanctioned by male domination and the exploitation of women. Unfortunately, even if this can be described as a distinctively Japanese configuration of factors in 1937, no single nation can claim total immunity to such traits in their history. [25] Indeed, neither the history of the West, with its mixed record of enlightenment and colonial exploitation, nor the history of China, with its own share of imperial expansions and barbarity, can serve as a final point of reference to condemn Japanese aggression and atrocity in World War II.

The universal aspect is particularly relevant to the postwar generation that, though removed from World War II horrors such as the Nanjing Atrocity, have witnessed the continuing destruction of human lives and violation of human dignity, be it in Rwanda or in the former Yugoslavia. A deeper understanding of the Nanjing Atrocity of 1937-1938 will not be complete if historians simply condemn it as a product of Japanese militarism and refuse to draw any wider implications that are universal. [26] It is incumbent upon us to realize that one of the ultimate goals of studying the Nanjing Atrocity today is to learn the proverbial lessons of the past in order to prevent such atrocities from happening again anywhere in the world. Given the repeated occurrence of genocide and mass brutality during the twentieth century, it is not surprising that designations of victim and perpetrator are used rather freely, more often than not giving rise to abuse. To use an experience of victimization in the past to demonize an entire people and to justify revenge constitutes the worst kind of abuse of history.

Toward a Constructive Dialogue

In their 1994 book *Telling the Truth about History*, historians Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob argue that "the intellectual spirit of democratic scholarship celebrates a multiplicity of actors, **[End Page 142]** diversely situated and skeptical of authority. They are seekers of a workable truth communicable within an improved society." [27] With their relative autonomy and professional code of behavior, historians should also aspire to build a trans-national community for rational dialogue concerning a mutually shared past. There are indications that such a trans-national community of historians is beginning to emerge in East Asia, even though their track record has not been an unqualified success. In the early 1990s, for instance, Japanese and Korean historians attempted to narrow the gap between their respective history textbooks in a series of seminars. [28] In 1996, a quasi-official Korean-Japanese Joint Committee to Promote the Study of History was established to further such efforts.

Given the different political systems in Japan and China, it is not surprising that the communication of views aimed at eliminating differences in historical accounts should be encountering more difficulties. [29] Many Japanese scholars have complained that there is not yet the "psychological basis" among the Chinese to accept new conclusions about the Sino-Japanese War based on academic research, such as who fired the first shots in the Marco Polo Bridge Incident that ignited the war in 1937. [30] Some even point to cultural factors as an obstacle to a common understanding between the two countries. While favoring better mutual understanding between Japan and China, for instance, Hirayama Ikuo, a well-known Japanese painter and the president of the Japan-China Friendship Association, noted that cultural differences influence how the Chinese and the Japanese view the past. According to Hirayama, the Chinese are practical and rational in seeing and speaking about the truth, whereas the Japanese are unique in being able to understand [each other] even without saying everything. [31]

The differences over the Nanjing Atrocity have multiple causes. Many Chinese historians do not enjoy the same kind of access to the evidence available to their Japanese counterparts, in part due to language barriers; most still find it difficult to challenge official government positions on these sensitive issues. On the other hand, while many Japanese historians do confront the dark pages of their national history and strive to break down national barriers, some in Japan seem obsessed with particularities such as death figures without paying attention to the greater political and moral implications of the wartime transgressions in general. When asked by an American historian to explain why it is so difficult for the Japanese to accept the Nanjing Incident and to admit to the shameful behavior in Nanjing, a prominent Japanese historian replied somewhat **[End Page 143]** indignantly "For me, to apologize for things that can't be ascertained as facts is very difficult. To apologize for something that can't be ascertained, like Japan killed 300,000 or 400,000 people, what does it become?" He may be quite right with respect to the exact number of casualties, but as the American historian pointed out, the issue at stake was not in obtaining the exact figure but in admitting that what happened in Nanjing was both tragic and shameful. [32]

Despite considerable improvements in Japanese textbook coverage and public awareness of Japan's wartime behavior, the persistent and aggressive denial of past aggressions in Asia by some politicians and certain segments of Japanese society also makes a trans-national dialogue difficult. As Japanese historian Yoshida Yutaka has pointed out, the nationalistic rhetoric of some scholars and politicians in Japan is inflicting greater damage by inciting anti-Japanese nationalism in Asian countries such as China, and thus further stimulating nationalism among the Japanese, creating a vicious cycle. To break this cycle, Yoshida suggests, the most important task is for Japan to "settle the past" unmistakably on a political level. That such settlement has not been sufficiently achieved is the greatest obstacle to free discussion between Japan and its Asian neighbors that transcends national boundaries. [33]

Will a candid admission of Japan's wartime transgressions, including the Nanjing Atrocity, amount to making history a "political toy" in bilateral relations and enabling China to play the "history card?" Such concerns over exploiting the past are certainly legitimate, since the Chinese government has too often used history for its own political objectives. [34] But one must look beyond political considerations. Straightforward recognition of events like the Nanjing Atrocity is more likely to create a kind of "psychological basis" needed for genuine and meaningful collaboration on this intrinsically divisive and emotional subject. There are indications that many historians in both China and Japan have also come to this conclusion of a need for greater cooperation. As Sun Zhaiwei, a leading Chinese historian of the Nanjing Atrocity, pointed out recently, even the sensitive subject of death tolls in Nanjing is open to discussion as long as "one respects and recognizes the historical fact" that the invading Japanese troops wantonly slaughtered the Chinese people on a large scale. [35] **[End Page 144]** As one popular history writer in Japan reminded his readers, while the often proposed joint Chinese-Japanese investigation of the Nanjing incident would be useful, the Japanese must first admit that "the Nanjing Atrocity did happen." [36] Pragmatic statements like these coming from both countries offer hope that it is indeed possible to move toward a constructive trans-national dialogue, even on such a highly disputed subject as the Nanjing Atrocity.

The Task Ahead

While historians may still consider themselves professional custodians of the past, they exercise this prerogative often in competition with other groups in a society. In his recent book, *History in Three Keys*, historian Paul A. Cohen studies the 1900 Boxer Uprisings in China as experience, myth, and event. While defending the enterprise of historians, Cohen concedes that "the very notion that the truth about the past, what historians seek to attain, is necessary and always of greater value than what people want to believe is true about the past may itself be little more than a myth." [37] According to Cohen, the existence of several kinds of values--moral, intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic--makes it impossible to rank one assertion about the past absolutely higher than others. Although Cohen's subject is China, his description is true in all societies. In 1995, the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum had to scale

down its exhibition of the destructive power of the Atomic bombs in Hiroshima, because of strong opposition from veterans groups and the U.S. Congress. America's own Enola Gay fiasco is but one example that professional historians are by no means the unchallenged creators of public memories in a democratic society. [38]

Writing a truly trans-national history of a major traumatic event such as the Nanjing Atrocity is no easy task. It requires time, patience, and great effort from all parties, historians and others alike. At a minimum, it is important to conceive a subject such as the Nanjing Atrocity as an historical event within a common historical framework that is firmly grounded in meticulous scholarship and sensitive to its moral implications at both the particular as well as universal levels. Only then may we initiate and sustain a process of fruitful dialogue by which historians in different countries can approach, reach, and ultimately secure a common ground for writing trans-national history. In this sense, a trans-national history of the Nanjing Atrocity is a useful challenge for historians, as it is an important step toward healing and reconciliation of a violent and tragic past for Japan and China.

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Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the symposium on Nanjing 1937 at Princeton University, November 1997. I would like to thank Mark Eykholt, Joshua Fogel, Okiyoshi Takeda, Takashi Yoshida, as well as the editors at the *SAIS Review* for their helpful comments. For historiographical issues relating to the Nanjing Atrocity, see Daqing Yang, "Convergence or Divergence: Recent Historical Writings on the Rape of Nanjing," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 3 (June 1999): pp. 841-864.

2. The next highest choices given were "Japanese aggressors and the War of Resistance" (81.3 percent), "Cherry Blossoms," "*bushidô*," and "Mount Fuji" (all around 50 percent). *Asahi Shimbun*, February 17, 1997, [evening edition].

3. Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997). Recently, the publication of a Japanese translation was suspended and then canceled due to disagreements between the author and the Japanese publisher, largely over the treatment of factual errors in her book. Contrary to some media reports, right-wing pressure, while certainly a factor, did not appear to be the direct cause of the suspension and cancelation.

4. "Spokesman on Japanese Envoy's Remarks on Nanjing," FBIS-CHI-98-131, May 11, 1998.

5. William Lee Howell, "The Inheritance of War: Japan's Domestic Politics and International Ambitions," in Gerrit W. Gong, ed., *Remembering and Forgetting: The Legacy of War and Peace in East Asia* (Washington: CSIS, 1996) p. 97.

6. "Atarashii rekishizô o motome," *Seiron* (August 1997): p. 78. Curiously (or perhaps revealingly), this self-proclaimed "liberal" organization renders its own title in English as the "Japanese Institute for Orthodox History Education." See Atarashii kyôkasho o tsukuru-kai comp., *Atarashii Nihon no rekishi ga hajimaru* (Tokyo: Gentôsha, 1997) copyright page. For a perceptive analysis of their agenda, see Gavan McCormack, "The Japanese Movement to 'Correct History,'" in *Bulletin for Concerned Asian Scholars* 30, no. 2 (April-June 1998): pp. 16-23.

7. For a good background analysis, see Arif Dirlik, "'Past Experience, If Not Forgotten, Is a Guide to the Future'; or What Is in a Text? The Politics of History in Chinese-Japanese Relations," in Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian, eds., *Japan in the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) pp. 49-78.

8. Quoted in E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961) pp. 6-7.

9. See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question in American History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

10. Indeed, the standard line deployed by those defending the neo-Nazi revisionists is that all history is mere opinion, as pointed out in Christopher R. Browning, "German Memory, Judicial Interrogation, History Reconstruction: Writing Perpetrator History from Postwar Testimony," in Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) p. 31.

11. James E. Young, "Toward a Received History of the Holocaust," *History and Theory* 36, no. 4 (December 1997): p. 41.

12. See Carlo Ginzburg, "Just One Witness," in Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation,* pp. 82-96.

13. See, for example, Michael Schudson, "Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory," in Daniel L. Schacter, ed., *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains,* and Societies Reconstruct the Past (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

14. Young, "Toward a Received History of the Holocaust," p. 39. In fact, it can be argued that historian's truth may be more appropriately considered contingent, since it depends on his evidence and interpretation, while victim's truth is more experiential.

15. Arno J. Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken: The "Final Solution" in History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988) p. xiii. I quote from him with the full awareness that his revisionist conclusions were not accepted by many historians and might be misused by others.

16. Michael Stanford, *The Nature of Historical Knowledge* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) p. 178.

17. Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) p. 32.

18. For a complete version with deleted passages restored, see Ishikawa Tatsuzô, "Ikiteiru heitai," in *Zôkan Chûô Kôron--Shôwa-ki no bungaku* (1997): pp. 274-350.

19. Hata Ikuhiko, *Nankin jiken* (Tokyo: Chûkô shinsho, 1986) pp. 108-109.

20. "'Nankin daigyakusatsu' no kakushin," *Shokun!* 17, no. 4 (April 1985): p. 76.

21. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, p. 166.

22. Ide Junji, "Watashi ga mokugekishita Nankin no sangeki," *Zôkan Rekishi to Jinbutsu* (1984): p. 276.

23. Sun Zhaiwei, ed., *Nanjing datusha* (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997). Understandably, he takes pains to emphasize that the fierce Chinese resistance, while a factor in intensifying the Japanese troops' thirst for revenge, should in no way excuse the perpetrators of the atrocities.

24. Yoshida Yutaka, *Tennô no guntai to Nankin jiken* (Tokyo: Aoki shoten, 1987).

25. An exemplary work that examines both sides of a brutal conflict without relativizing the responsibility of either is John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); see also Yuki Tanaka, *Hidden Crimes: Japanese War Crimes in World War II* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

26. Lisa Yoneyama has also emphasized both particular (Japan) and universal (cross-space) aspects regarding memories of the Asia-Pacific War. See "'Hikokumin' no kioku to kioku no hi-kokuminka," *Sekai* (October 1997): p. 269.

27. Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (New York: Norton, 1994).

28. Kazuhiko Kimijima, "The Japan-South Korea Joint Study Group on History Textbooks and the Continuing Legacy of Japanese Colonialism," trans. by Hiromitsu Inokuchi, *Bulletin for Concerned Asian Scholars* 30, no. 2 (April-June 1998): pp. 47-52.

29. The success of the German-Polish Commission on Textbooks, which has been in operation since 1972, suggests that different political systems need not be the crippling factor.

30. Cited in Hata Ikuhiko, "Seiji no omocha ni sareru rekishi ninshiki," *Shokun!* (September 1997): p. 39. See also Tôgo Shigehiko, "Rekishi no 'seisan' wa kanô ka?" *Zaikai* 42, no. 20 (August 15, 1994): p. 68. Not all reappraisals are rejected by all Chinese. In fact, Hata's own 1986 book, in which he carefully analyzed the Nanjing Atrocity and offered an apology to the Chinese people, is

translated and published in Hong Kong with due respect, despite its much lower estimate of the total number of Chinese victims. See Introduction to Hata Ikuhiko, *Nanjing shijian* (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1995).

31. Hirayama Ikuo, "Yûki o motte rekishi to mukiau," *Ronza* 31 (November 1997): p.196.

32. For this exchange, see Kojima Noboru et. al., *Jinrui wa sensô o fusegeru ka* (Tokyo: Bungei shunjusha, 1996) pp. 293-295.

33. Yoshida Yutaka, "Heisai suru nashonarizumu," *Sekai* (April 1997): p. 82.

34. For a recent case study of how politics affected *both* Chinese and Japanese government responses to the Textbook Issue of the 1980s, see Caroline Rose, *Interpreting History in Sino-Japanese Relations* (London: Routledge, 1998).

35. Sun Zhaiwei, *Nanjing datusha*, pp. 9-10.

36. For instance, see popular history writer Hosaka Masayasu, *Bôkyaku sareta shiten* (Tokyo: Chûô Kôronsha, 1996) p. 107.

37. Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Experience, Myth, and Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) p. 295.

38. Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The Enola Gay and Other Battles for the American Past* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996).