A SINO-JAPANESE CONTROVERSY: THE NANJING ATROCITY AS HISTORY

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In a short story that later became known as the "Rashōmon" 羅生門, the novelist Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川竜之介 described a perplexing murder case in tenth-century Kyoto. A traveling samurai and his wife were waylaid by a notorious bandit. The wife was raped and the husband was found dead. However, each of the characters in this story—an eyewitness, the bandit, the dead samurai, and his wife—told a different story of what had happened. Presented with a series of contradictory accounts, the reader is thus left with the conundrum: What was the truth? Akutagawa's point was, simply, that all truth is relative, with the corollary that there is no "Truth" at all.¹

To be sure, such a problem is not confined to fictional circumstances. In studying history we, too, often encounter cases where drastically different evidence or interpretations seem to disclaim the very existence of a single historical truth. Although novelists like Akutagawa can leave it to their readers to provide answers to such a puzzle, historians, who investigate the past and look for meaning for the present and future, find themselves denied the right to do so.

The incident known in the West as the "Rape of Nanking" is one such example. Long regarded as the single most notorious Japanese atrocity during World War II,² the incident has resurfaced as one of the most controversial issues of modern history in both Japan and China in recent decades. The nomenclature describing this incident, such as the (Great) Nanjing Massacre, the (Great) Nanjing Atrocity, or the Nanjing Incident, reflects nothing more than the tip of the iceberg of discrepant representations.³ In Japan alone, the often heated debate has produced over a score of books and numerous articles.⁴ Having not only embroiled a segment of the academic world but also created an uproar among the general populace, it has become what one historian called "a social phenomenon" in that country.⁵ Despite the absence of an internal debate, this description was no less true of China, both mainland and Taiwan. In the People's Republic of China, apart from its continued presence in the mass media, the 1937 atrocity has made its onto the silver screen and is remembered by numerous monuments including a grand memorial complex.

Despite all the attention that the most objective historians have professed to uphold, historical Truth in this case appears to have been forever buried with those who perished in Nanjing more than half a century ago, no longer accessible to those who survived them. So far, little has been written in English about the recent controversy, and what follows is a survey of the major developments in this
Sino-Japanese controversy. Obviously, atrocity is but one aspect of that tragic period in the relations between China and Japan. However, the great debate over the Nanjing Atrocity seems to have transcended any particular historical event and has taken on a life of its own. Therefore, it provides a special opportunity for studying World War II as remembered in both countries and their evolving relationship since then.

I

Although largely a phenomenon since the early 1970s, the Sino-Japanese controversy over the Nanjing Atrocity cannot be fully understood without an examination of its prehistory. The wartime reports, the war crimes trials called by the Allied Powers after the war, and early postwar publications in both countries have much to tell about the current debate.

The world first learned of the atrocities in Nanjing in The New York Times on December 13, 1937, five days after the fall of the city to the Japanese. In several dispatches sent from Shanghai, correspondent F. Tillman Durdin, who left Nanjing three days after the Japanese takeover, wrote of the "wholesale atrocities and vandalism" of the Japanese Army.7 Meanwhile, in letters to their friends in Shanghai, a few foreign citizens who remained in Nanjing to organize refugee relief, described the rampant looting, raping, and slaughtering by Japanese soldiers. The Manchester Guardian reporter H. J. Timperley reproduced some of these letters in his 1938 book, What War Means: Japanese Terror in China, severely castigating the Japanese brutality toward the Chinese. The book was published in London and New York, and Guo Moruo郭沫若, a well-known Chinese writer who had been educated in Japan, wrote the preface for a simultaneous Chinese translation.8 During the war, many Chinese newspapers and magazines carried their own stories of the atrocities in Nanjing, as those who had escaped from the fallen capital described their hellish experiences. Inside Nanjing a partial damage survey of the area was conducted in 1938 by Lewis S. C. Smythe, an American professor of sociology at the University of Nanking.9 Although the exact magnitude was unknown, the Japanese atrocities in Nanjing, well before reports of war atrocities in Europe, sent a chilling shock wave around the world, not excepting diplomats of Japan's later ally, Germany.10

After the war, investigations into the alleged Japanese atrocities in Nanjing by the Nationalist Government of China, in collaboration with the Supreme Command of the Allied Powers in Japan, produced a large body of materials for the prosecution, including both Chinese and foreign eyewitness accounts, contemporary newspaper reports, damage surveys and statistical records of burial organizations in Nanjing. Overwhelmed, the defense efforts appeared feeble and the appeals of innocence were rejected. In 1946 four Japanese Army offi-
cers received the death penalty at the military trial in Nanjing for organizing or participating in the atrocities perpetrated against Chinese. Two years later Matsui Iwane 松井石根, Commander of Japan’s Central China Expeditionary Force at the time of the atrocity, was hanged together with six other Class A Japanese war criminals at Sugamo Prison in Tokyo. Both Matsui Iwane and Hirota Kōki 広田弘毅 were found guilty for failing to stop the atrocities in Nanjing. As to the extent of the Japanese atrocities, the military tribunals in Nanjing and in Tokyo agreed on the estimates of about 20,000 cases of rape and one-third of all buildings damaged, but reached slightly different conclusions over the death toll. The Tokyo trial put it at over 200,000, while the Nanjing trial claimed that more than 300,000 Chinese were killed by the Japanese. An even higher figure of 430,000 also came out during the latter trial.

An atrocity of such magnitude cannot be easily forgotten by the Chinese, who look at their recent past as a century of suffering and humiliation at the hands of foreign aggressors. During the early 1950s, the Nanjing Atrocity made national headlines, probably for the first time, in the People’s Republic of China. In the midst of the Korean War, the threat of an American military encirclement and its encouragement of Japan’s remilitarization were both real and imminent. The Nanjing Atrocity, in this context, was a time-honored reminder of past foreign invasions. An article on the incident published in the national Xinhua yuebao 新華月報 in 1952, detailed American crimes during the massacre and charged that a dozen or so Americans who remained in Nanjing "not only responded well to the imperialist policies of the U. S. Government, but also protected their companies, churches, schools and residences with the blood and bones of the Chinese people." The International Safety Zone Committee, the author argued, was made up of imperialists and fascists, and served as the vanguard for the invading Japanese troops. More specifically, the article called attention to the "faithful collusion" between the Japanese and the Americans, quoting one Chinese survivor as saying, "the American devils called out the names and the Japanese devils carried out the execution." Pictures of Japanese atrocities were printed along the slogan "Remember the Nanjing Massacre, Stop American Remilitarization of Japan!" The use of history as an object lesson could not have been more obvious.

The Nanjing Atrocity also provides an exemplary instance of the corruption and incompetence of the Nationalist Government. For example, in the early 1960s when a few former Nationalist generals (who had remained on the mainland after 1949) published reminiscences of the defense of Nanjing, they invariably condemned Chiang Kai-shek’s capitulation as a major cause for the heavy loss of Chinese lives. Thus, domestic reactionaries were regarded as no less responsible than the foreign invaders for the great tragedy.

In his recollections of the war crimes trial, the former Chinese judge at the Tokyo trial urged his compatriots to make a "comprehen-
sive and scientific study" of the Nanjing Massacre, calling the inci-
dent second only to the Nazi atrocities in World War II. Even
without such a call, a study by the history faculty and students at
Nanjing University was already under way. In 1960 the History De-
partment surveyed many survivors of the atrocity and two years later
completed an eight-chapter manuscript with newly compiled statistics
of massacre, rape, pillage, and destruction in Nanjing. Although the
plan for publication did not materialize, this study had important
implications for future studies. For instance, in 1965 the History De-
partment provided the municipal foreign affairs agencies with the
results of its research, including all the statistical computations
and photographs, for use in the reception of interested Japanese
visitors. Since then, historians at Nanjing University have also
held briefings and photograph exhibitions for visiting Japanese dele-
gations and provided Japanese scholars with these research materials.
In this way, the lesson of history began to reach a Japanese audience
as well.

On the Japanese side, due to wartime control of the Japanese
press, most Japanese did not learn about the atrocities in Nanjing
until the Tokyo trial. During the next twenty years, stories of the
Nanjing massacre sporadically made their way into print as episodes
in war reminiscences. Recollections written by former correspondents
and soldiers in China tended to confirm in general the existence of
atrocities in Nanjing. Writing in Bungeo shunju in 1957, a
former Asahi shinbun reporter recalled that on a cold winter
night he heard continuous machine gun fire and was told by an officer
that about 20,000 Chinese captives had been killed. However, most
of such personal reminiscences were sketchy, and the incident itself
was far from being a subject of public interest or serious dispute.

The 1960s saw a gradual increase in non-governmental contact
between Japan and China. Many Japanese visitors to China returned
with renewed memories of Japanese wartime atrocities, which they
obtained from their Chinese hosts or at the exhibitions there. In
1965, a report about the visits to the "victimized areas," obviously
based on briefings by Chinese officials, was published by the Repat-
riates Association in Japan. The Nanjing Atrocity began to get atten-
tion. For instance, after visiting Nanjing in 1967, Niijima Atsu-
yoshi published articles on the massacres in several maga-
zines and later helped put on a stage play at Tokyo University. Not
all visitors, however, were persuaded by their Chinese hosts about
the Japanese atrocities. Renowned commentator Oya Soichi, who went to Nanjing as a newspaper correspondent immediatly after
its fall to the Imperial Japanese Army, led an investigative group to
Nanjing in the summer of 1967. At a briefing arranged by the
Chinese, Oya questioned the number of 300,000 deaths and one-third of
the buildings burnt. However, for the most part he remained quiet on
the subject in Japan until his death in 1970.

Among those Japanese visitors to Nanjing during the mid-sixties,
Hora Tomio 洞富雄 was to play a prominent role in the subsequent debates. A professor of Japanese history at Waseda University, Hora visited China at the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. As a result of the visit, his 1967 book Kindai sen shi no nazo 近代戦史の謎 (Riddles of Modern Military History), included a chapter entitled "The Nanjing Incident" which comprised one-third of the entire book. Greatly disturbed by the recent justifications of the "Greater East Asia War" by some Japanese writers, Hora wrote about the Japanese atrocities in Nanjing:

in order to provide material for introspection, to renew the feeling of apology to the Chinese people, and to clarify the truth about the Nanjing Incident, which resulted from the erroneous national leadership by the military clique. 18

Hora was to persist in this conviction, as well as most of the other conclusions he drew from this pioneer study. Making extensive use of the transcripts of the Tokyo War Crimes Trial, along with contemporary reports by foreigners in China and war reminiscences published in postwar Japan, Hora systematically examined the Japanese massacre of disarmed Chinese soldiers and other atrocities against Chinese civilians. Although he dismissed the figure of 430,000 as a bit unbelievable, he basically agreed with the Chinese figure of 300,000 as close to the actual number. In conclusion, he held high-ranking Japanese officers to be responsible for the massacre and charged that the entire Japanese military system was to blame for the atrocities against civilians. 19

Despite the fact that China-related issues were becoming increasingly prominent in the Japanese media by the late 1960s, Hora's work did not set off any immediate controversy, as wartime Japanese atrocities in China had been seldom written about before then. It was not until 1971 when the "taboo in journalism" about the Nanjing Atrocity, to use Hora's term, was finally broken. 20

II

If Hora was correct, then Honda Katsuichi 本多勝一 should be credited with demolishing this taboo. A prize-winning, prolific writer, Honda was known for his reportage and opposition to the American war in Vietnam. Stories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as the My Lai massacre had already been known in Japan, Honda reasoned, but no systematic study of Japanese atrocities had ever been done, which explained why many Japanese found it difficult to understand China's concern over the revival of militarism in Japan. In 1971 Honda made a 40-day tour of China, visiting sites of Japanese atrocities and collecting eyewitness accounts and other evidence. After returning to Japan, he published a series of reports in the Asahi
Honda quoted from Chinese sources a death toll figure of 300,000 in Nanjing, but he also added the different estimates given at the Tokyo trial by the Nationalist Government and in Hora’s recent study. Probably more disturbing to Japanese readers than those figures were the photographs of mutilated bodies and severed heads of the Chinese victims, published along with the report. Equally so were the vivid reminiscences of the Japanese atrocities by several Chinese survivors. Honda’s reports and his book, published by Japan’s premier newspaper shortly before Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei’s historic visit to China, quickly occupied national attention. At about the same time Hora expanded his 1967 chapter into a full-fledged book entitled *Nankin jiken* (The Nanjing Incident). Slightly later, two volumes of related documents under Hora’s editorship were published as part of a series of source materials on the Sino-Japanese War. Included were transcripts of the Tokyo War Crimes Trial dealing with the Nanjing Atrocity as well as translations of contemporary foreign reports of the incident. Thanks to the efforts of this popular reporter and this renowned historian, the Nanjing Incident thus had emerged from oblivion in Japan.

Added attention was soon brought to the incident by several disputing accounts. Only months after Honda’s series started, the April 1972 issue of Shokunin, a journal published by Bungei shunjū, carried an article entitled “‘Nankin dai gyakusatsu’ no maboroshi” (The illusion of the Nanjing Massacre), followed by more discussion of the Nanjing Atrocity in later issues, which, like Honda’s serialized reports, appeared in book form with the same title published by Bungei shunjū a year later. Suzuki Akira, the author of these articles, challenged much of the evidence used by Hora and Honda, calling attention to the scarcity of primary sources that confirmed the massacre and the appeals of innocence by the convicted Japanese.

One of the cases in question was the notorious "killing contest" mentioned in Hora’s books and Honda’s reports. Two young Japanese officers were reported by the wartime Japanese press to have engaged in a "friendly competition" to see who could kill more Chinese on the way to Nanjing, and because of it both were sentenced to death at the Nanjing Trial after the war. Suzuki claimed that his own investigation, which included an interview with the former Chinese judge then residing in Taiwan, had proved the entire story to be pure fabrication. Moreover, Suzuki charged that the Japanese journalists in the 1970s were turning the Nanjing Incident into another illusion, just as those in the late 1930s lacked the courage to confront the truth.

Suzuki’s book was also an immediate success, winning him a Bungei shunjū prize in the category of nonfiction named after the late Ōya Sōichi. Literary celebrities who served as referees eulo-
gized the work as "admirable" and "courageous." However, an immediate response came from Hora, who published a series of critiques in a historical journal. Soon these critiques appeared in book form as *Nankin dai gyakusatsu, "maboroshi"-ka kōsaku hihan* 南京大虐殺："まぼろし"化工作批判 (The Nanjing Massacres: Repudiation of the Maneuvering to Turn It into an "Illusion"), published by the Contemporary History Publication Society as a major rebuttal.24

By the mid-seventies, the debate over the Nanjing Atrocity had begun in earnest. To Suzuki's defense came commentator Yamamoto Shichihei 山本七平, who also wrote in *Shokun!*, disputing the possibility of a massacre in Nanjing; Yamamoto was none other than the mysterious Isaiah Ben-Dasan, a self-acclaimed Jewish expert and author of the book *The Japanese and the Jews*. Meanwhile, Honda joined forces with Hora and engaged Ben-Dasan in a few rounds of open letter debates.25 However, the debate did not last very long. No comprehensive study of the incident comparable to Hora's appeared on the opposite side, for the Nanjing Massacre was challenged, but the opposition was far from having disproved it in its entirety.

In late June 1982, all four Japan's major, national newspapers carried headlines claiming that the Ministry of Education had forced the revision of high school textbooks. Within days the news event escalated into a diplomatic crisis, as the governments of China and Korea filed formal protests against the alleged Japanese attempt to recant the recognition of their past aggression. As a consequence of the textbook flap, the issues related to the war once again came to the forefront of national attention, in spite of the misinformation in the newspaper reports.26

Although the most controversial point in the textbook revision was the change from *shinryaku* 侵略 "invade and plunder" to *shinkō* 進攻 "enter and assault," or even to the neutral *shinshutsu* 進出 "advance," in the description of pre-1945 Japanese activities on continental Asia, the revised texts about the Nanjing Atrocity also came under fire. The historian and textbook writer Ienaga Saburō 家永三郎 filed his third law suit against the Ministry of Education for violation of the Constitution in textbook revision. One of the three cases in Ienaga's suit was over the description of the Nanjing Atrocity.27 One textbook, for example, described the event in following words:

> When Nanjing was occupied, the Japanese troops killed large numbers of Chinese soldiers and civilians, engaged in assaulting, looting, and burning, and were charged with the Nanjing Massacre by the world. It is said that the Chinese victims reached 200,000.28

After the government-initiated revision, it reads:
In the confusion when Nanjing was taken, the Japanese troops killed large numbers of Chinese soldiers and civilians and were charged by the world with the Nanjing Massacre. 29

The original of another textbook recounted that "the Japanese troops which occupied Nanjing massacred a large number of non-combatants and received international criticism." The revised text adds an explanation:

Meeting strong resistance from the Chinese forces, the Japanese troops suffered heavy losses. Aroused by this the Japanese troops massacred large numbers of Chinese soldiers and civilians when Nanjing was taken and received international criticism. 30

Passages like these became evidence to the press that the Japanese government was trying to minimize and justify wartime Japanese atrocities such as those in Nanjing. Such suspicion was only confirmed when a member of the government Textbook Examination Council was quoted as saying: "It was not fair to describe the Nanjing atrocity in three to five lines while mentioning Soviet or American atrocities against the Japanese in only one line or two." 31 This examiner further suggested that it was blasphemy for Japanese troops to emphasize Japanese atrocities. Although the dispute here often was over nothing more than a few lines in textbook footnotes, over which high school students could probably not have cared less, the debate over the Nanjing massacre soon resumed with an unprecedented momentum.

Only a few months after the textbook controversy, Hora published Ketteiban: Nankin dai gyakusatsu 決定版：南京大虐殺 (The Definitive Edition of the Nanjing Massacre). Although the title was not exactly his own choice, as he later explained it, this work represented his renewed effort to revise and fortify his earlier conclusions. As a journalist, Honda went on another visit to China, this time along the route of the 1937 Japanese attack. His Nankin e no michi 南京への道 (The Road to Nanjing) was serialized in the Asahi jaanaru 朝日ジャーナル in 1984 and told of more stories of Japanese atrocities between Shanghai and Nanjing. More importantly, a Society for Investigation and Research into the Nanjing Incident was founded in the same year; its members meet regularly in monthly discussions and have also organized group visits to Nanjing and Taiwan. Their research has resulted in a few monographic studies of the Nanjing Atrocity as well as translations of Chinese works. 32

Also alarmed by the textbook controversy, there were other Japanese who became indignant at what they regarded as foreign interference in Japan’s internal affairs as well as the Japanese government’s compromising positions vis-a-vis China. Tanaka Masaaki 田中正明, who claimed to have once worked under General Matsui during the
war in China, emerged not only as a natural defender of his former superior but also as the champion against the so-called "Tokyo Trial view of history." When the textbooks restored their original texts in 1984, he and six others filed a suit against the Ministry of Education at the Tokyo District Court, demanding 2 million yen as compensation for "mental suffering" as a result of the Ministry's mistakes.\textsuperscript{33} Meanwhile, Sankei shinbun 産経新聞 requested that former participants in the battle of Nanjing write Tanaka and offer their testimony. Using General Matsui's wartime diary and some of those testimonies, Tanaka published Nankin gyakusatsu no kyokō 南京虐殺の虚構 (The Fabrication of the "Nanjing Massacre") in 1984. A Society for Genuine Sino-Japanese Friendship was also organized by Tanaka and other researchers who shared his views.\textsuperscript{34}

By now the debate over the Nanjing Incident was in full swing. Supporters of Hora and Honda, usually left-oriented, were labelled the "massacre faction." As their forum, the Asahi newspaper and related journals often published special issues on the Nanjing Atrocity. On the other side, the "illusion faction," as Suzuki, Tanaka, and their sympathizers were called, were regular contributors to Bungei shunjū, its offshoot Shokun!, and Seiron 正論. Both sides saw the debate over the Nanjing Atrocity as a focal point of two diametrically opposite views on the nature of Japan's actions in World War II as well as a testing ground for attitudes toward present Sino-Japanese relations.

The "massacre faction" would stress the aggressive nature of the war; the "illusion faction" would like to see the Tokyo Trial denounced unequivocally. The former would emphasize the importance of understanding Chinese sentiments and apologizing for Japanese crimes; the latter would call such actions masochism and capitulation under foreign pressure. The verbal exchange was not always polite, and sarcasm was the rule rather than the exception. It is not surprising, therefore, that the debate over the Nanjing Atrocity often was unfocused and counter-productive. As a Japanese historian has characterized it, this noisy debate produced more superficial comments than concrete results.\textsuperscript{35}

However, the debate was not lacking in dramatic moments. In the aftermath of the textbook controversy, Kaikōsha 偕行社, a fraternal organization for army cadet school graduates, sent an urgent request to its 18,000 members for eyewitness accounts that could disprove the Nanjing Atrocity. This was carried out on the suggestion of Unemoto Masami 鈴本正己, a participant in the battle of Nanjing himself and a postwar instructor at Japan’s National Defense University. A member of the "illusion faction" who put the illegally killed Chinese in Nanjing at between 3,000 to 6,000, Unemoto edited members' letters into an eleven-part series entitled "Battle History of Nanjing Based on Testimonies." A Ministry of Education official was said to have expressed the view that the result of this project might be used to discredit Hora's theory in future textbook revisions.
Contrary to the expectations of the Kaikōsha, many members offered testimony that confirmed the massacre. Among them was a former officer under Matsui, who estimated that some 120,000 captives were killed under orders of a staff officer. Although he later modified the figure to "no less than tens of thousands," his testimony alone aborted the entire effort to deny the atrocity. In the concluding part of the series, another editor of Kaikōsha's journal wrote that "there was no excuse for such massive illegal executions. As someone related to the old Japanese Army, I have to apologize deeply to the Chinese people." This statement, however, met with strong opposition from within. Tanaka, for one, managed to frustrate the plan of publication of the complete testimony, questioning the wisdom of a veteran organization like Kaikōsha to publish a book that would damage the reputation of the Imperial Army.36

The most publicized scandal in the history of the debate came near the end of 1985. A popular historical journal, Rekishi to jinbutsu 歴史と人物, discovered that in the newly published Matsui wartime diary, there were as many as 900 errors. Although some of them were minor mistakes, others were obviously intentional alterations to deny the existence of the Japanese atrocity in Nanjing.37 The great irony, however, was that the author of these distortions was none other than Tanaka Masaaki himself, an adamant critic of falsification. Most people were shocked at such blatant fabrications of important primary material. Itakura Yuriaki 板倉由明, although a former ally of Tanaka's, analyzed the distortion in Rekishi to jinbutsu, which even won Hora's "admiration." Itakura, however, was not happy to see this incident become the ammunition for the contesting "massacre faction." A month later he wrote an essay for Bungei shunju, this time not so much criticizing Tanaka as attacking Hora and Honda. He argued that even without alteration, the diary would disprove the massacre, as Matsui made no mention of massive executions of captives. Moreover, Itakura accused Hora and Honda of distortion and inconsistency in their own recent works and concluded that they were of the same stock as Tanaka's.38

Fortunately, not everyone falsified documents. In 1984, part of the wartime diary of General Nakajima Kesago 中島今朝吾 was published in Rekishi to jinbutsu "as it was." Nakajima commanded the 6th Division that took Nanjing and then stayed in the city to maintain order. Among other things, his diary did mention "the policy generally not to take captives" as well as a search for large trenches to execute seven or eight thousand of them. At one point, he claimed to have watched a Japanese sword master decapitating two Chinese captives waiting to be executed.39 This was one of the most significant pieces of evidence about organized atrocities in Nanjing, recorded by one of the highest Japanese commanders on the scene. Meanwhile such written records were confirmed by recollections from the former rank-and-file. At this juncture, however, both sides of the debate claimed victory. The "massacre faction" finally had the atrocity
recognized as a undisputable fact, but their opponents argued that death tolls of 200,000 or 300,000 were now proved to have no substance.\footnote{40}

In such a highly politicized and polarized debate, it was not easy for dispassionate scholarship to win a seat. Some new works, however, attempted to maintain impartiality. Historian Hata Ikuhiko, for instance, based his 1986 study of the Nanjing Incident on many previously untapped military records as well as reminiscences of Japanese soldiers. Making the distinction between war casualties and illegal atrocities, Hata came to an estimate of 40,000 victims, while expecting a slight increase as new evidence might appear. Moreover, he offered institutional and psychological explanations of the widespread Japanese atrocities in Nanjing and regarded General Matsui to be ultimately responsible for the behavior of his subordinates. However, Hata's middle-of-the-road position has drawn criticism from both camps. He has been accused of having minimized the extent of the Japanese massacre, which would be useful in future textbook examinations. Meanwhile, Unemoto pointed out that Hata was talking nonsense by simply choosing a figure between 12,000 and 40,000, two contemporary estimates made respectively by M. S. Bates and Edgar Snow.\footnote{41}

Thus, more than a decade after the debate first began, no single interpretation has been able to convince the others, although it is accepted by most people that the massacre, whether big or small, did in fact occur in Nanjing in late 1937. The initial heat in the wake of the textbook flap has somewhat died down, but irreconcilable differences still persist between the two contending parties, with a synthesis seeming hardly possible. While the "illusion" contenders are still trying hard to disprove the arguments of the "massacre" scholars, not without any success, the latter are uncovering other previously little known Japanese atrocities in China and offering more explanations. Polarization is likely to continue, as both sides have been joined by younger members. The correct number of the Chinese killed still remains a puzzle to be solved, but even if future evidence can narrow the difference in statistics, different meanings derived from the Nanjing Atrocity are not likely to disappear completely.

\section*{III}

Even before the textbook controversy, the Chinese were not unaware of the Japanese debate over the Nanjing Atrocity during the 1970s. When a revised version of the 1962 Nanjing University study was printed for "internal reference," its authors noted that "while most of the Japanese works adhere to the truth, uphold the historical facts, and condemn the atrocities of Japanese militarism from the standpoint of justice, there have been a few attempts to erase this
historical fact from a reactionary position." In the decade of the Sino-Japanese "honeymoon," following the normalization of diplomatic relations in 1972, however, friendship was the word of the day. It was not until 1982 that the Chinese began to take the matter more seriously.

As reports of Japanese textbook revision reached China, the Nanjing Incident, along with other Japanese wartime atrocities in China, resurfaced in the Chinese press almost overnight. The mid-August commemoration of the anniversary of Japan's surrender took a decisively negative tone, as major Chinese newspapers carried articles under such titles as "How Can History be Distorted?: Records of the Japanese Massacre in Nanjing." Survivors of the 1937 massacre once again recounted their hellish experiences in newspapers and on television. On August 12, the "Exhibition of Criminal Evidence of the Japanese Massacre in Nanjing" was opened to the public; among its exhibits were dozens of photographs as well as several well-kept Japanese swords and machine guns.

As Chinese historians once again performed their duties, detailed studies began to appear in more specialized history journals. They used verdicts of both the Nanjing and Tokyo Trials, which had been seldom touched upon in China, and they occasionally drew evidence from Chinese eyewitness accounts and other contemporary foreign reports. A few authors also quoted from Japanese sources. Despite a few differences in style and emphasis, all of these writers seemed to share the same conviction that "the textbook revision was a clear signal that a few people were attempting to revive Japanese militarism," and therefore historians in the two countries "should join their hands in educating themselves and the younger generation with true history, and draw lessons from it in order to pass on the friendly relations between the two peoples to future generations." The 40th anniversary of the China's victory in the War of Resistance, the year 1985 marked the beginning of another wave of publications and activities related to the Nanjing Atrocity. Both quality and variety have reached a new level. Most notable was the inauguration of the Memorial for the Compatriot Victims in the Nanjing Massacre by the Japanese Invading Troops, the construction of which began less than two years earlier on the 46th anniversary of the fall of Nanjing in 1937. Present at the ceremony were Chinese provincial and municipal officials as well as representatives from Japan. The name of the building was transcribed in the handwriting of Deng Xiaoping . Supplementing the numerous photographs in the modern memorial complex were human bones that reportedly have been excavated in the process of construction. The strongest message, however, was a few words inscribed on the front wall in Chinese, English, and Japanese: "VICTIMS 300,000," the official Chinese estimate of those killed by the Japanese. Meanwhile, smaller but no less conspicuous monuments commemorating the Chinese victims mushroomed at over a dozen sites of Japanese massacres throughout the city. A
typical inscription, usually written by well-known calligraphers, was a vivid lesson in patriotism:

The invading Japanese troops massacred our 300,000 compatri­
 ots in Nanjing in December 1937. As many as 2,000 were killed in the vicinity... This monument is erected in order that future generations will never forget [the incident] and will be determined to strengthen China and make her prosper forever.45

This time, Chinese artists also joined the effort to make the Nanjing Massacre a part of China's collective memory. Zhou Erfu 周而復, one of China's senior novelists, published Nanjing de xianluo 南京的陷落 (The Fall of Nanjing), a work he conceived at the time of the textbook controversy. Praised as "a monumental work depicting the great war of resistance," this historical novel described the defense of Nanjing as well as the Japanese atrocities in photographic lan­
guage.46 A nonfiction entitled Nanjing da tusha 南京大屠殺 (The Nan­jing Massacre), which appeared a little later, made extensive use of oral history and foreign language materials.47 More recently, the Nanjing Atrocity also made its way onto the silver screen. Co-pro­duced by the Fujian and Nanjing Film Studios, "Tucheng xuelei"屠城血淚 (Blood and Tears in the Massacre) premiered in 1988. Revolving around a young Chinese doctor who was eventually killed after taking many pictures of the Japanese atrocities, the movie was regarded by Chinese veterans who escaped from the massacre as "historically ac­curate and full of national sentiment."48

In historical scholarship too, 1985 marked a new phase in the study of the Nanjing Atrocity in China. Gao Xingzu 高興祖, a pro­fessor of history at Nanjing University and one of the co-authors of its 1962 study, published Rijun gin-Hua baoxing: Nanjing da tusha 日軍 侵華暴行：南京大屠殺 (Atrocities of the Japanese Invading Troops in China: The Nanjing Massacre). Carefully footnoted in Chinese, English, and Japanese sources and mostly dispassionate, the book and other articles by him represented the best research on the subject in China.49 Gao also participated in the project which resulted in the publication of a "draft history" of the Nanjing Atrocity.50 Even more encouraging was the compilation of original documents and eye­witness accounts.51 A city-wide survey, though inconclusive, turned up 1756 eyewitnesses to the atrocities, among whom 176 had escaped alive with scars still visible on their bodies, 514 had had relatives killed, and 44 women who had been raped by Japanese soldiers.52 Many of their testimonies were published together with reprints of contem­porary Chinese reports and translations of English materials.

Despite these recent efforts, current Chinese studies differ little from the earlier conclusions on several key issues. Regarding the scope of the atrocity in Nanjing, for instance, the aformentioned "draft history," which represented up-to-date Chinese scholarship,
still put the total death toll of soldiers and civilians at over 300,000. 53 Unlike in most Japanese works, virtually no distinction has been made between legal and illegal killing, as the Chinese still quite naturally view the entire conflict as Japanese aggression, clear and simple. To explain the Japanese atrocities, most Chinese authors believe that the massacre was planned by the Japanese high command, including General Matsui, before the attack on Nanjing had begun. Moreover, many see it as a natural, modern manifestation of the Japanese militarist-expansionist tradition. "Japanese militarism should bear the sole responsibility," concludes one recent Chinese writer, "but the Japanese people had no share of it, as they were victimized." 54 Another writer refers to the Nanjing Massacre as "nothing but a major display and act of Japanese militarist bushido spirit during the early stages of war." 55

Quite a few translations of Japanese books about wartime atrocities, such as the infamous 731 Unit, have become popular reading in China. Several Japanese works on the Nanjing Atrocity were also available in Chinese so as to keep the public informed of the conflicting views in Japan. One was Tanaka Masaaki's The Fabrication of the "Nanjing Massacre," prefaced by a severe Chinese critique. "This translation is intended to provide a negative example," explained the Chinese translator, "which serves as a reminder that there is still another side in current Sino-Japanese relations." 56 The Chinese reader will find a brief history of the debate over the Nanjing Atrocity in Japan in Gao's introduction to the Chinese translation of Hora's The Proof of the Nanjing Massacre (Nanjing da tusha de zhengming 南京大屠殺的證明). 57 Needless to say, Hora Tomio and his colleagues have won wide praise from Chinese scholars.

Alarm to Japanese revisionism over the Nanjing Atrocity was by no means limited to the People's Republic, and scholars in Taiwan have also begun to address the issue, with no less vigor. Li Yunhan 李雲漢, for instance, made a lengthy survey of the literature on the Nanjing Atrocity, while another scholar, Li Enhan 李恩涵 has published several studies concerned with Japanese atrocities in China, including discussion of the questions of responsibility and the death toll in the Nanjing Atrocity. 58 Two volumes in the series Geming wenxian 革命文献 (Documents of the Revolution), published by the official Committee on KMT History, were devoted to the "Nanjing Massacre." 59 As if a replay of history, the Japanese wartime atrocities in China helped produce another "united front" between the Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, as books and articles authored by mainland Chinese have been reprinted in Taiwan and vice versa. 60

Although the previously noted gap in scholarship has largely been filled, recent Chinese studies are by no means definitive, given the complexities of the problem. Certain issues in the Nanjing Atrocity, such as the death toll, remain a sensitive area of research in China and are thus rarely disputed. Certain conclusions have been predetermined and therefore healthy scholarly revisionism will not
come easily. This partly explains the virtual uniformity in Chinese scholarship, despite its increased output. As a result, acknowledged one Chinese writer, "the Japanese have produced more works, which are systematic and persuasive, while the Chinese publications use more emotional language but lack detailed analysis and comment." This same author also pointed out that frequent mistakes, unnecessary additions, or exaggerations in the Chinese works could only provide pretexts for an opponent. To make things more difficult, except for some newly recorded eyewitness accounts, little new documentation has come to light in China since the war crimes trials that would make some kind of breakthrough possible. Cross-references with Japanese sources have just begun. Thus Chinese historians, like their counterparts in Japan, still have much ahead to provide the most convincing answers to the conundrum.

IV

Benedetto Croce once said that all history is contemporary history. Events in the past become historically known when they "vibrate in the historian's mind," as he or she criticizes and interprets historical evidence. Inevitably, historians bring into their work, either consciously or not, the influence of the times in which they live. The Sino-Japanese controversy over the Nanjing Atrocity is a vivid reminder of historians' fallibility; in fact, everyone's. It was politics, helped by the mass media, that has made the controversy a "social phenomenon" rather than academic quibbling inside the ivory tower. Therefore, the debate also serves as a window into the two societies in the painful process of reckoning with their past conflict.

The virtual unanimity with which the Chinese speak on the issue reflects the widely shared views of the World War II and of Japanese militarism, which have been reinforced by the government-sponsored news media, education, and academic research. A comparatively far more pluralistic society, Japan has been the center stage for this prolonged drama. In a way, the debate over the Nanjing Atrocity is a microcosm of the clashes between larger ideological undercurrents in Japanese society, in terms of evaluating the past and making choices for the future. So far it has served its participants rather well. To some perpetrators the debate was a last chance of public confession before leaving this world. To many others, it has been an occasion to demonstrate their unshaken faith, whether in Sino-Japanese friendship or Japan's past innocence. To the news media it simply makes a good story. And, for serious historians, it may also be a useful exercise of their academic skills, provided that they are not overwhelmed by the profusion and confusion.

The story does not end here. The many factors that have been at work to make the Nanjing Atrocity a twentieth-century Rashōmon phen-
omenon are unlikely to disappear in the near future. While the Japanese wartime atrocities in China have become a field of study in both China and Japan, the Nanjing Atrocity remains at its center. As the research topic has itself widened and new areas have begun to be explored, the dispute over the actual death toll has lost some of its predominance with time, but to many the body count is what it counts. Unfortunately, the dead cannot speak for themselves, as they did in Akatalagawa's story. New questions have to be asked and comparisons made before we are able to understand what happened in Nanjing better not so much the events themselves but their meanings in history. All these point to that conclusion that as an issue of debate the Nanjing Atrocity is far from being dead.

Notes

1. For a translation of Akutagawa's story as well as reviews and commentaries of the cinematic masterpiece of it made by Kurosawa Akira 黒沢明, see Donald Richie, ed., Rashomon (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987).


3. The choice of terminology had had important implications in this debate. Generally speaking, "rape of Nanjing" has been used primarily in the West, while the Chinese have always referred to it as the "Nanjing da tusha" 南京大屠杀 (great massacre of Nanjing). In Japanese, while "dai gyakusatsu" 大虐殺 (great massacre) or "gyakusatsu"虐殺 (massacre) tend to confirm the magnitude of an atrocity—as does "dai zangyaku" 大虐殺 (great atrocity)—"Nankin jiken" 南京事件 (the Nanjing Incident) clearly lacks these connotations.


5. Hata Ikuhiko 秦郁彦, "Ronsō shi kara mita Nankin gyakusatsu jiken" 論争史から見た南京虐殺事件 [The Nanjing Massacre as seen from the history of the debate surrounding it], Seiron 正論 198 (February 1989), pp. 234-35.


10. For a contemporary account, see Haldore Hanson, "Humane Endeavor": The Story of the China War (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1939), pp. 139-46; see also Edgard Snow, The Battle for Asia (New York: Random House, 1941).
11. The Nanjing Trial, in particular, has been relatively under-studied. Mei Ruao 梅汝璈 offered some reminiscences in his "Guanyu Gu Shoufu Songjing Shigen he Nanjing da tusha shijian" 關於谷寿夫松井石根和南京大屠殺 事件 On Tani Hisao, Matsui Iwane, and the great Nanjing Massacre], Wenshi ziliao xuanji 文史資料選輯 22 (1961), pp. 16-36.

12. See "Zhuiyi Rikou zai Nanjing da tusha" 记者日军在南京大屠杀 [Remember the great Japanese massacre at Nanjing], reprinted in Xin-Hua yuebao 新華月報 3, pp. 988-91. A similar accusation can be found in Guo Shijie 郭士傑, Rikou qin-Hua baoxing 日寇侵華暴行 [Atrocities of the Japanese Invasion of China] (Beijing: Lianhe shudian, 1951).

13. See the recollection of Du Yuming 杜聿明 and others in Wenshi ziliao xuanji 12 (December 1960).

14. See note 9 above.

15. See the preface and epilogue to Department of History, Nanjing University, Riben diguozhuyi zai Nanjing de da tusha 日本帝国主義在南京的大屠殺 [The Nanjing Massacre of the Japanese Imperialists] (Internal publication, Nanjing, 1979).


19. Ibid., p. 141.


22. Ibid., p. 288.


24. Hora Tomio, Nankin dai gyakusatsu, "maboroshi"-ka kōsaku
25. For the texts of these letters, see Honda Katsuichi, Korosu
gawa no ronri 没死劇の論理 [The Logic of the Killers] (Tokyo: Suzusawa
shoten, 1972), pp. 113-306.

26. For an overview of the controversy, see Chalmers Johnson,
Affairs 59 (Fall 1986), pp. 402-20.

27. Kimishima Kazuhiko 君島和彦 and Inoue Hisashi 井上久士 , "Nankin
dai gyakusatsu kyōka ni kansuru saikin no dōkō" 南京大虐殺評
価に関する最近の動向 [Recent developments concerning evaluations of the
great Nanjing Massacre], Rekishi hyōron 歴史評論 433 (April 1986),
p. 29.


29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid., p. 18.

32. Hora Tomio, Fujiwara Akira, and Honda Katsuichi, eds., Nankin
jiken o kangaeru 南京事件お考える [Reflections on the Nanjing Inci-
dent] (Tokyo: Ōtsuki shoten, 1987); and Hora, Fujiwara, and Honda,
eds., Nankin dai gyakusatsu no genba e 南京事件の現場へ [At the


34. Tanaka Masaaki, "'Nankin dai gyakusatsu kinenkan' ni
monomōsu" 南京大虐殺記念館に物申す [What's this? A 'Memorial
Hall' to the great Nanjing Massacre?], Seiron 160 (December 1985),
p. 105.

35. Hata Ikuhiko, "Ronsō shi," p. 239.

紀之, "Nankin jiken o meguru arata na ronsōten" 南京事件おめぐろ新た
な論争点 [New points for debate concerning the Nanjing Incident],
reprinted in Chūgoku kankei Ronsetsu shiryō 中国関係論説資料 [Essays
Concerned with China] (1986), part 4, vol. 2, p. 188; and Kimishima

37. Itakura Yuriaki, "Matsui Iwane taishō 'jinchū nikki' no
kaizan no ayashi" 松井石根大将 '陣中日記' 改装の怪 [Suspicions of
tampering with the "Staff Diary" of General Matsui Iwane], Rekishi to jinbutsu 歴史と人物15 (Winter 1985), pp. 318-31.


40. See, for example, Kasahara Tokushi 笠原十九司, "Nankin jiken kenkyū o meguru jōkyō to mondai"南雲事件研究をめぐる状況と問題 [The present state and problems in research on the Nanjing Incident], Rekishigaku kenkyū 571 (September 1987), p. 46. 歴史学研究


42. Department of History, Nanjing University, Riben diguozhuyi, p. 2.


46. See the introduction the novel, in Dangdai 当代 4 (1985), p. 198.

47. Xu Zhigeng 徐志耕, Nanjing da tusha 南京大屠殺 [The Great Nanjing Massacre] (Taibei: Shibao wenhua chubansha, 1989). This is a Taiwanese reprint.


49. Gao Xingzu, Rijun gín-Hua baoxing: Nanjing da tusha (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1985). See also "'Nanjing da tusha' de shishi burong mosha" 南京大屠殺的史実不容抹煞 [The his-
historical facts of the "Great Nanjing Massacre" will not be obliterated], *Riben wenti* 6 (1986), pp. 29-38; and "Guanyu Nanjing da tusha shijian de yuanjiu xianzhuan he jinhou keti" [On the present state of research and future tasks concerning the incident of great Nanjing Massacre] (n.d.). The last of these works was given to me by a professor from Nanjing University, and I do not have the full reference to it at this time.


53. See Qin-Hua Rijun Nanjing da tusha shigao, p. 130.

54. See, for example, the critique by Pan Junfeng 潘俊峰, in Tianzhong Zhenming (Tanaka Masaaki), "Nanjing da tusha" de xugou 南京大屠杀的虚構 [The Fabrication of the "Great Nanjing Massacre"] (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubansha, 1985), p. 15.

55. Fu zeng 付曾, "Nanjing da tusha yu Riben diguozhuyi"南京大屠杀与日本軍国主義 [The great Nanjing Massacre and Japanese imperialism], *Jindai shi yanjiu* 近代史研究 16 (February 1983), p. 177.


57. Dong Fuxiong (Hora Tomio), Nanjing da tusha de zhengming [Proof of the Great Nanjing Massacre] (Shanghai: Shanghai yiwen chubanshe, 1986).

Jindai shi yanjiusuo, 1985); Li Enhan, "Rijun Nanjing da tusha de dushaling wenti" 日军南京大屠杀的屠杀令問題 [Issues concerning the massacre orders from the Japanese army’s great massacre at Nanjing], Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindai shi jikan 中央研究院近代史集刊 18 (June 1988); and, most recently, Li Enhan, "Riben jun Nanjing da tusha de tusha shumu wenti" 日本軍南京大屠殺的屠杀數目問題 [The question of the number murdered by the Japanese army in the great Nanjing Massacre], Guoli Taiwan shifan daxue lishi xuebao 国立台湾師範大学歷史学報 18 (June 1990).


60. Excerpts from Guo Qi 郭岐, Nanjing da tusha 南京大屠杀 [The Great Nanjing Massacre] (Taibei: Zhongwai tushu chubanshe, 1979), for instance, were published in a mainland Chinese journal, Wanxiang 万象.

61. See the article by Yang Qijiao 楊智樵 , in Riben de Zhongguo yimin 日本的中國移民 [Chinese Immigrants in Japan], ed. Chinese Association for the Study of the History of Sino-Japanese Relations (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1987), pp. 340-41. Judging from the content, Yang is probably now living in Hong Kong or Taiwan.