

## Winter 2006 Winner

*Cecilia Yang*

### *Instructor's Foreword*

Some essays are written in unfamiliar rooms, where hands search in the dark for objects to balance the body. Others develop as if from afar, taking shape in a wind that curls and collects dust from field and roof, pollen and leaves from distant trees. One essay senses the hinge of an open door as it moves into the hallway ahead; the other becomes aware of a faraway valley, feels the mist in the air and notices in the sky the orange dome of streetlight. This second kind of essay slowly reconstructs what has happened on the other side of the mountains.

Cecilia Yang's essay could not have been written if it did not work in both ways. Her essay is a personal journey as much as it is a study in politics, history, and rhetoric. It is itself a memorial for those who have suffered in unspeakable anguish, not only in the massacres of World War II, but in the long and painful shell game of politics that has followed. Her essay was painstakingly constructed, researched, written and rewritten, translated and retranslated, cut and expanded and polished.

You cannot read this essay and not feel a deep and almost unspeakable conviction in its claims, urgency, and haunting beauty. Cecilia has given us an essay that shows that the intellectual, the aesthetic, the ethical, and, indeed, the political are capable of coalescing in the form of the research essay. This kind of writing cannot be demanded all at once in a classroom. But the fact that it was produced in a classroom is proof of something. The writing workshop can still do what is so hard for it to allow: To say yes to dissolving itself, if only for a little while. To let go a bit in the presence of art, making it possible for one's students to reconfigure the class as they go far, far beyond its humble structures.

*Scott Herndon*

# The Memorial Hall for the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre: Rhetoric in the Face of Tragedy

*Cecilia Yang*

*In Germany and in several European countries, it is a crime to deny the existence of the Holocaust.*

*Regarding the Holocaust, there are “thousands of books, museum exhibits, and documentary and feature films . . . because the determination of the surviving Jewish community never let the world forget.”*

*In comparison, the Nanjing Massacre is relatively unknown to this world. Compared to the Holocaust, “virtually nothing is in print about the Rape of Nanking . . .*

*– Yin, *The Rape of Nanking: An Undeniable History in Photographs**

## 0 *Ground zero*

Memorials are symbols, and both are black holes.

Memorials are objects that serve the memory of the dead, built so we never forget; they are trump cards (revealed with trembling, anxious fingers) played in the fear of amnesia. Looking like mere objects but evoking the powers of memory, memorials are potent symbols, elevating the status of their otherwise tangible selves.

Black holes are the end product of astronomical asphyxiation: burning their last remnants of fuel, dying stars sputter their last breaths before exploding into fiery supernovas, which then collapse into the extremely dense matter of a neutron star. As time passes, gravity pulls its matter even more tightly to its core; radius shrinks but density explodes.

If human tragedy is the supernova, its residue becomes the dense matter that forms memorials. Memorials strive to mirror black holes, attempting to compress the heavy weight of human tragedy into its core, the confines of architectural structure. Is this possible? Can memorials encapsulate the sorrow and inexplicable chaos of catastrophe within stone, bronze, wood, ink – mere earthly materials?

Can you condense the tragedy of an entire city into the mold of symbols?

How do you memorialize catastrophe?

## 1 *The year that Alabama drops rape charges against the ‘Scottsboro Boys’*

**July 1, 1937.** The Marco Polo Bridge Incident officially marks the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War, fought between Japan’s Imperial Army and China’s National

Revolutionary Army. The Japanese invasion of China, part of a strategic plan to control the Asia mainland, lasts eight<sup>1</sup> years.

**August 13, 1937.** The Japanese army invades Shanghai, international trade center and gateway to central China. A day less than a month later, Shanghai is captured and the victorious Japanese, led by Senior General Iwane Matsui, march towards Nanjing<sup>2</sup>, then the capital of China.

**December 13, 1937.** Nanjing, a city 2,400 years old, one of the “Four Great Ancient Capitals” of China (*Zhōngguó Sì Dà Gūdū*), falls to the Japanese.

*Nanjing, special correspondent Imai, December 17*—On this day of shouting and excitement, the cheers of one hundred million countrymen resound. Today, the deafening cries of banzai rising to the top of the city wall are the marvel of the century. Jubilation is breaking out here, in a bold, splendid ceremony to celebrate our entrance in the city. It has been four months since this army assembled its troops for the holy war in central China, and as the magnificent result of our fighting, we have captured the enemy capital and gained ascendancy in all of China. Here, we have established the foundation of peace in East Asia. Can anyone look at the Rising Sun flag waving so magnificently over the headquarters of the Nationalist government without tears of emotion?

As he tries to convey to his homeland the actuality of the extremely majestic and soul-stirring ceremony, the pen of this reporter trembles with emotion and excitement. Over Nanjing are clear skies like those of Japan, deep blue with clear air and not a single cloud . . . (Honda 183)

This article, written by reporter Imai Masatake for the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*, celebrates the Japanese capture of Nanjing. The accompanying photograph, titled “Ceremony of Entering the City,” visually depicts this same event, showing victorious Japanese troops, led by General Matsui, parading through the city’s Zhōngshān Gate (Yin 48). The uniformed officers sitting upon identical tall black horses, backs straight and hands gloved, are stately figures of modest triumph. Soldiers are lined up stiffly along the streets in perfect rows, their faces expressionless in the blank-eyed soldier gaze, their heads turned in identical angles. Shadows fall across the hard solemnity of their cheekbones: they are the perfect images of men. Their shadows stretch across the dust of the road in a perfect barcode of greys. It is winter, 1937 in Nanjing.

Chinese artist Li Zijian also painted the city that year, but the rhetoric of his images of Nanjing is vastly different. Looking at his canvas, viewers confront a mountain of tangled bodies, where light glints off twisted, disjointed limbs like a brain’s folded grey matter. Bodies upon bodies are piled on top of each other, corpses mixed with the living (but it is apparent that this heterogeneous mixture will fall into the homogeneity of death soon).

---

1 In Chinese culture, the number eight (*bā*, 八) is considered a lucky number because it sounds like the word “prosper” (*fā*, 发).

2 Nanjing’s city flower (also the national flower of the People’s Republic of China) is *Prunus mume*, a species of Asian plum. The tree originates in China, but has grown in Japan since ancient times. In Chinese, *Prunus mume* is called *méi*, and in Japanese it is called *ume*, but in both languages it shares the same character (梅). When used in Japanese poetry, such as haiku or renga, *ume* is a ‘season word’ (words associated with a particular season) for early spring.

Not a single complete, whole body can be detected in the chaos of limbs – only bits and pieces can be spotted among countless lumps. Elbows jut out, legs and arms extrude in sharp angles, bending in every possible configuration. Hands are tightly bound with rope or outstretched, tendons taut. Blood seeps onto the ground of the painting, forming a lake at the foot of the mountain of human remains. Some faces blankly stare, some are twisted in pain, some are eternally frozen into mute screams. In the background, slate-blue gunpowder smoke curls toward the sky, and dirty snowflakes of potassium nitrate pollute the Yangtze River. Bright orange-red streaks from fuses occasionally glimmer across the atmosphere saturated with bleak blue-greys and drenched with blood. Other mountains of bodies, looking like charred indigo<sup>3</sup>, fill the background of the piece.

In a twist of fate where the political art of the East meets the religious iconography of the West, Li Zijin's masses of twisted bodies echo the imagery of Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* and Auguste Rodin's *Gates of Hell*, a piece in which eternally tormented souls form the hollows and projections of a 5.4 meter tall, 3.9 meter wide, seven ton sculpture of black bronze (Takenaka). In Dante's *Inferno*, Rodin's "acknowledged source of inspiration" (Faxon), the *Gates of Hell* are thus inscribed:

THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO THE GRIEVING CITY,  
THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO ETERNAL SORROW,  
THROUGH ME THE WAY AMONG THE LOST PEOPLE.

BEFORE ME WERE NO THINGS CREATED  
EXCEPT ETERNAL ONES, AND I ENDURE ETERNAL.  
ABANDON EVERY HOPE, YOU WHO ENTER.

(Dante, *Inferno*, III.1-3, 7-10)

The eyes of the viewer are meant to roam uneasily over the tumult of Li's painting, too, occasionally resting on several figures purposely set apart by choices of hue and saturation. A young man, eyes closed, face turned upwards as if in deep sleep, clutches at his chest with his right hand, blood leaking through his fingers and dripping down his stomach.<sup>4</sup> An infant<sup>5</sup> crawls on the peak of the corpse mountain, his small face scrunched with pitiful wailing, cheeks tearstained, tiny hands clutching at the breast of his dead mother

3 Purple Mountain (*Zinjin Shān*, 紫金山) is located on the eastern side of Nanjing. At dawn and dusk, its peaks are often enveloped in dusty violet-tinged clouds. The Purple Mountain Observatory, sitting on the third peak, was completed in 1934. It still houses ancient astronomical instruments invented by the Chinese; however, much of this original equipment was destroyed or stolen three years from the day it began operations.

4 *There is a devil back there who carves us so cruelly, putting the edge of his sword to each in this realm once we have circled through the suffering road, for the wounds have closed before any confronts him again.*  
(Dante, *Inferno*, XXVIII. 37-42)

5 *Here, as far as could be heard, there was no Weeping except of sighs which caused the eternal air to tremble; These resulted from grief without torture, felt by The crowds, which were many and large, of infants And of women and of men. My good master to me: "You do not ask what Spirits are these you see? Now I wish you to know, Before you walk further, That they did not sin . . ."*  
(Dante, *Inferno*, IV. 25-34)

lying beneath him. A ripped robe exposes ripped wounds around her ribcage. In the foreground, two Japanese soldiers survey the scene. One crosses his arms in leisurely inspection, the other wipes blood from his sword, both similarly unaffected by the atmosphere of permeating grief and agony. These figures are only a few of the many that are clustered tightly together on Li's canvas of oils.

The title of Li Zijian's piece is *Nánjīng dà túsù*<sup>6</sup>, or The Nanjing Massacre. He depicts the same place and time that Masataki had also known and glorified with words quivering with emotion. And yet, how starkly different the two pieces are. In fact, so different that we may wonder how it is possible that both pieces can be depicting the same event, how the grisly terror contained in Li's painting can have any connection with the bright exhilaration contained in Masataki's article.

The Nanjing Massacre is known by several other names, including the "Rape of Nanking" and the "forgotten holocaust of World War II" (Chang). After the city of Nanjing had fallen to the Japanese Imperial Army on December 13, 1937, war atrocities occurred in almost unfathomable numbers over a proportionally minute period of time. The terror that ensued, the extreme brutality of the Japanese soldiers, the intensity of death that pervaded the city is difficult to believe and grasp: within the time span of only "six weeks" (Chang), over 250,000 Chinese soldiers and innocent civilians (including the elderly, women, and children) were slaughtered, both systematically and indiscriminately. More shocking than the number of the dead, however, is the manner in which they were killed, which has been revealed by the testimony of survivors, witnesses and participants in the Massacre alike.

Tang Junshan, survivor and witness to one of the Japanese army's systematic mass killings, testified:

*The seventh and last person in the first row was a pregnant woman. The soldier thought he might as well rape her before killing her, so he pulled her out of the group to a spot about ten meters away. As he was trying to rape her, the woman resisted fiercely. . . . The soldier abruptly stabbed her in the belly with a bayonet. She gave a final scream as her intestines spilled out. Then the soldier stabbed the fetus, with its umbilical cord clearly visible, and tossed it aside. (Honda 164)*

In his confession, *First-hand Experience of the Nanjing Massacre* (1984), former soldier Kozo Tadokoro wrote:

*At the time, the company I belonged to was stationed at Xiaguan. We used barbed wire to bind the captured Chinese into bundles of ten and tied them onto racks. Then we poured gasoline on them and burned them alive. . . . I felt like [I was] killing pigs. (Yin 174)*

In his *Personal Account of the Nanking Massacre* (1984), former soldier Kazuo Sone wrote:

To boost the morale and courage of the new recruits during the war, we experimented with bayoneting the enemy. That meant using POWs or local civilians as live targets. New recruits without any battle experience would learn from this practice. . . .

The human targets wailed and howled in extreme pain. Their blood spurted from open wounds. At this point, the recruits would be frightened by what they had done. The horrifying

6 Synonyms for *túsù* (屠杀): butchery, slaughter.

scene softened the murderous look on their faces. But when victims continued to scream in pain, the blood gushing from their bodies, the soldiers would stab aimlessly and repeatedly, hoping to end their lives quickly and escape the ordeal, until their live targets became motionless. (156)

The way in which prisoners of war met their fate was another distinguishing feature of the Nanjing Massacre's brutal killings. After the Japanese victory at Nanjing, Chinese soldiers who were unable to escape by crossing the Yangtze River or by fleeing into the International Safety Zone were rounded up by Japanese soldiers, and instead of being treated humanely (as the Geneva Conventions dictate), they were systematically slaughtered through "strict orders from top commanders of the Japanese Imperial Army" (78). The International Military Tribunal for the Far East (also known as the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal), which met from 1946 to 1948 to prosecute Japanese leaders for war crimes committed during World War II, concluded:

Large parties of Chinese soldiers laid down their arms and surrender outside Nanking; within 72 hours after their surrender they were killed in groups by machine gun fire along the bank of the Yangtze River. Over 30,000 such prisoners of war were so killed . . . That these estimates are not exaggerated is borne out by the fact that burial societies and other organizations counted more than 155,000 bodies which they buried . . . these figures do not take into account those persons who were destroyed by burning or by throwing them into the Yangtze River or otherwise disposed of by Japanese. (78)

Toshio Ohto was an officer ordered to take charge of the disposal of bodies on the western Xiaguan Wharfs. At his trial in Fushan, a city located in northeast China, he revealed that innocent civilians, in addition to the POWs, met the same, brutally executed fate:

Out of the 100,000 bodies, 30,000 were buried or burned. The rest were tossed into the Yangtze River. I assume other troops must have disposed of at least 50,000 on their own. Among the bodies we disposed of, most were civilians. I saw our troops still shooting at them with machine guns when I arrived at Xiaguan Wharfs. I remember many of them were still alive after being shot. There were about 350 still alive among the 20,000 disposed of by my command. I ordered my soldiers to use iron loading hooks to finish them off before loading them onto boats or tossing them into the river, using the same hooks . . . (92)

This method of killing is reflected onto Li Zijian's painting. His piece, painstakingly painted with graphic detail and vivid color, complements the photographs that also depict the results of the mass executions of the Nanjing Massacre. Painters, with their abilities to overflow voids left by the deficiencies of our imaginations, can convey what grainy black and white photographs cannot.

More than sixty years later, we can still see inconsistencies between Japanese and Chinese accounts of the Nanjing Massacre. Contributing to the escalating tensions between the two nations that still persist to this day, the stark contradictions between Li and Masataki's pieces continue to manifest as literature, historical records, paintings, sculptures, and even memorials.

## 2 *F=-kx, where x is equal to the span of the East Sea*

The Nanjing Massacre (only) lasted for six weeks, but war atrocities of the same nature were committed in other areas of northern China until Japan drew from World War II

combat on August 15, 1945. The Massacre was “only vaguely known until after the war” (Fogel 12), as the only recorded evidence thus far were the writings – which had to be “smuggled to the outside world” (12) – of some Chinese and a few Westerners who had stayed in Nanjing during that time. During the Massacre, Japanese soldiers had either destroyed or concealed incriminating evidence at the scene of the crimes: bodies of murdered Chinese POWs were burned or thrown into rivers, and rape victims were killed “so that they could not live to bear witness” (Yang 246). Additionally, during the war, authorities within Japan suppressed evidence of these atrocities, exercising “strict censorship control over both foreign correspondents and their own writers at home” (Yang 246).

In a survey conducted in 1996, “nearly eighty-four percent of some 100,000 Chinese . . . chose the ‘Nanjing Massacre’ when asked what they associate most with Japan” (Yang, Challenges). Yet, the Nanjing Massacre still remains widely unknown to countries outside of Asia to this day, even long after it occurred – why is this so? Politics constitute one reason. Not only is Japan guilty: the U.S. and other Western powers significantly suppressed knowledge about Japanese war atrocities committed during World War II in the interest of rebuilding a Japan that could compete with China during the Cold War. As Japan was the only “clearly viable Asian ally of the Western camp in the confrontation with Communism, the Second World War tended to be treated as a dead issue . . . [other Asian countries] were under Communist rule, threatened by insurgency, or dependent on Japanese economic aid, so were not in a position to pursue issues affecting them which had resulted from the war” (Hicks viii), thus it was possible for Japanese officials and business circles to avoid references to events that stained their national history, such as the Nanjing Massacre.

Furthermore, those who did hear about the Massacre found it difficult to believe, since its nature stretched the limits of plausibility. Despite diaries and personal accounts of the Chinese, Japanese, and Westerners who testified to the nightmarish brutality of the atrocities committed, the overall extent of horror was difficult to fathom. According to historian Mark Eykholt, this disbelief in the Nanjing Massacre was “rooted in the feeling that a modern people such as the Japanese could not act in such uncivilized ways” (Eykholt 13). Additionally, to this day, the Japanese government has not yet issued an official apology for Nanjing Massacre, a decision that both amplifies the “collective amnesia” (Chang) that continues to surround the event, and contributes significantly to the tensions between China and Japan today. Worsening the tension are the efforts of “revisionist,” or extremist, groups within Japan that do not merely shift responsibility but go a step further to completely deny, or lessen the magnitude, of the Nanjing Massacre.

Until the 1980s, China was mostly silent about the Nanjing Massacre, and the subject “remained in the background of Chinese identity with respect to Japan” (Eykholt 26). However, in the 1970s, after revolutionary fervor settled in China, the two nations began to seek better relations, nudged by a secondary impetus: opportunity costs. Economics were the “real linchpin of developing Sino-Japanese relations” (26) – each saw in the other the possibility of gaining scarce resources without a significant loss of their own. Only when China and Japan began to develop ties of friendship did the undercurrent of uneasy past memories surface, leading to deepening cultural, political, and rhetorical tensions that have lasted until today.

During the 1980s, certain groups within Japan attempted to purge their history of past war atrocities. In 1987, news reporters “both inside and outside of Japan accused Japan’s ministry of Education of toning down Japan’s war imperialism in public school textbooks by changing terms such as aggressive war into offensive war, blaming atrocities such as the Nanjing Massacre on the resistance of enemy peoples, and claiming that Japanese invasions were actually Japanese advances into other countries” (28). Historical textbooks became viewed as potential canvases upon which one could exercise artistic nationalism. In 2001, David McNeill, talk show host of a local radio station in western Tokyo, inspected a current Japanese textbook *Nihonshi* and found that:

The Nanking Massacre is not mentioned. The Nanking “Incident” is, as a footnote on page 234 to a one-sentence report that the Japanese army captured Nanking after fierce resistance. The footnote reads: *Konotoki, nihonhei wa hisentouin wo fukumu tasuu no chugokujin wo satsugai shi, haisengo, tokyosaibande ookiina mondai tonatta (Nanking Jiken)*. My translation of this: “During this time, the Japanese army killed many Chinese, including noncombatants, something that became an important issue at the Tokyo war crimes court after Japan’s defeat (the Nanking Incident).” (McNeill)

And that is all it says.

Textbooks are a fertile, thus especially dangerous, medium for distorting historical truth, as one set of text can prolifically affect multiple young minds.<sup>7</sup> The attempt by revisionist groups to erase the existence of the Nanjing Massacre, which had already been veiled, was shocking. It set off a storm of protest, creating opportunities to bring to the surface many of the “submerged aspects of Sino-Japanese relations, such as a desire by some Japanese to assert a more benign view of Japan’s role in the war and a desire of many Chinese to remember publicly the negative aspects of past Sino-Japanese interactions” (Eykholt 28). The two nations struggled between the paradoxical desires to establish friendly ties, as well as defend their country’s honor from another’s attack.

The following are only a few events from twenty years’ worth of the two nations’ internal and external conflict:

**1987:** Chinese officials canceled the scheduled visit of Japan’s Minister of Education, Ogawa Heiji, and also threatened to cancel the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Susuki Zenko, which had been “planned to coincide with the celebration of the tenth anniversary of Sino-Japanese friendship” (31).

**1994:** Japan’s new justice minister Shigeto Nagano “said what many Japanese officials are thought to believe but few dare utter . . . ‘The Rape of Nanking’ was, he said, ‘a fabrication.’ Japan in World War II, he added, was not an aggressor but a liberator of colonies” (*Shigeto Nagano*).

**Mid-1990s:** In China, the label “Angry Youth” (*fēnqīng*, 愤青) emerges, referring to the millions of young activists united on central issues such as war atrocities committed by the Japanese in China during World War II as well as Japanese leaders’ regular visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, a memorial in Tokyo that honors the Japanese war dead, actions that are seen as legitimizing the country’s past militarism. One such *fēnqīng*<sup>8</sup> activist, art instructor

7 Annelids (the phylum consisting of segmented worms) may reproduce asexually by fission, a quick method of reproduction in which the posterior part of the body breaks off and forms a new individual.

8 In Chinese, *fēnqīng* can mean either “striving youth” or “idiotic youth,” depending on the speaker. (“Hear China’s ‘Angry Youth’”)

Wang Lei, informs newspapers how he vents his politics through art (knowing that the Chinese government is wary of group activism):

For one recent piece, [Wang] erected a wooden statue of Japanese emperor Hirohito and invited Chinese passersby to whip it with a chain. After spending nearly \$3,000 on his political pieces, he hopes a gallery will pick up the tab for his dream project: creating bronze statues of Japanese politicians and then melting them with a blowtorch. (Osnos)

**1996:** the Chinese press “fired another round of criticism” (Yang 237) at Japan when the city of Nagasaki succumbed to pressure by conservative and right-wing groups to replace photographs of the Nanjing Massacre in its new Atomic Bombing Museum.

**1998:** While visiting Tokyo, Chinese president Jiang Zeming “publicly [demands], and failed to get, another apology from Japan for its past aggressions” (*Ghosts from China and Japan*).

**2005:** China stated that it would block Japan’s effort to join the UN Security Council until Japan is “properly repentant” for its past lethal imperialism in China. Earlier, in the spring, Chinese mobs had thrown bottles and rocks at the Japanese Embassy in Beijing as well as smashed up some Japanese businesses during brief rampages in Shanghai. James Mulvenon, Asia specialist at the Center for Intelligence Research and Analysis in Washington, stated that “this could possibly be the worst period of Sino-Japanese relations since World War II” (Marquand, *Nationalism Drives China, Japan Apart*).

**2006:** Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi “[rejects] Chinese and South Korean criticisms of his five visits to the Yasukuni Shrine” (*Japan-China friendship*).

**2006:** Chinese premier Wen Jiabao states that relations between China and Japan cannot improve until Prime Minister Koizumi no longer visits the Yasukuni Shrine.

Though the struggles between the two nations materialize differently each time, they revolve around shared foci: Japan’s denials and refusals to atone for its past aggressions and atrocities. Of all these conflicts, it seems that the Yasukuni Shrine has been a significant contributor to the multilayered accumulation of tension: the visits to one particular memorial have continually remained one root of the disputes. But how can the act of commemorating the dead lead to reverberations ringing of anger and protest, leading to controversy and eventually ultimatums? Commemoration is remembering lives lost and sacrificed; it seems a necessary, humane thing to do.

Located in Tokyo, Japan, the Yasukuni Shrine (in Japanese, *Yasukuni Jinja*<sup>9</sup>) sits upon the slopes of Kudan Hill. Built in the style of the Japanese Shinto shrine and sharing features with Buddhist temple architecture, the Yasukuni Shrine opens with traditional *torii*<sup>10</sup> gates, constructions of two upright supports topped with two crossbars that separate the secular world from the spiritual. Though *torii* are usually made of wood or stone, painted vermilion, the first two gates of the Yasukuni Shrine are respectively constructed of steel and bronze. Sixteen-petaled chrysanthemums<sup>11</sup> stamp the wooden Divine Gate and fluttering white curtains adorn the Main Sanctuary and the Hall of Worship. Lush

---

9 The Japanese word *jinja* literally translates to “peaceful nation shrine.”

10 The kanji of the *torii* (鳥居) translates into “bird dwelling,” suggesting that the form and structure of the *torii* resembles a perch for birds. This is no coincidence; in Shintoism, birds are considered the messengers of the gods.

11 Chrysanthemums were cultivated in China as a flowering herb as far back as the 15th century BC. The flower was introduced into Japan around 8th century CE and was adopted by the emperor as his official seal.

evergreens, maples, carpets of fern and moss cluster together in the Shrine's garden, their emerald shades reflecting onto the surface of a black pond, where colors of koi fish flicker and gleam.

The Meiji emperor built the Yasukuni Shrine in June of 1869 to commemorate the lives lost during the Boshin War, a civil war fought in Japan that directly led to the Meiji Restoration. Since then, the Shrine has been dedicated to all those who died for Japan and its Emperor, men and women, soldiers and civilians alike. As of the year 2004, the Shrine's *Book of Souls* was inscribed with 2,466,532 names of the war dead, now remembered and honored as *kami* within the memorial. In Japanese, *kami* means noble, sacred spirit; the word evokes a sense of quiet deference or adoration for the spirits and their authority achieved by virtue. Because the Japanese believe it is wrong to go near *kami* in a state of impurity, *temizuyas* – ritual water basins, offering long, slender stems of wooden ladles – are located at entrances to Shinto shrines. The *kami* of Yasukuni themselves, the spirits of the dead, are believed to reside within the deepest, darkest recesses of the *honden*, or the Main Sanctuary, located along the east-west axis that runs from the bottom of Kudan Hill (Breen). It is here that the Yasukuni priests, the only ones allowed to enter the *honden*, make offerings to the souls every morning and evening of every day of the year.

Through its careful design, the Yasukuni Shrine seems an effective, if not quintessential memorial. With its serene architecture, its air breathed by resting souls and spirits, pristinely kept gardens, wise twists of the Japanese Black Pine, all watched over by the Yasukuni priests, the Shrine seems a perfect sanctuary for intimate reflection and personal memories. It is the perfect place to quietly commemorate the dead, and reflect upon the lives lost so that you could keep your own. In this spiritual haven, with its serene echoes of quiet deference, it may be difficult to comprehend how this same place is the source of heated controversy and a constant victim of verbal whiplash by other nations during the past few decades.

The main reason for the controversy lies herein: of the 2.5 million *kami* housed within the Shrine's Main Sanctuary, over a thousand are convicted Japanese war criminals. Of the 1,068 convicted, fourteen were executed Class A war criminals, officers of the Japanese Imperial Army who had committed "crimes against peace" during World War II, as determined by the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal. On October 17, 1978, these fourteen were enshrined at the Yasukuni shrine as "Martyrs of Showa" to be worshipped as heroes. And of these fourteen, one was Iwane Matsui, leader of the attack against Nanjing on December 13, 1937.

Asia specialist James Mulvenon asks, "Try to imagine [German] Chancellor Angela Merkel going repeatedly to pay her public respects at a cemetery where a dozen high ranking Nazis and members of Hitler's inner circle were buried. Do you think that might be upsetting?" (Marquand, *Nationalism Drives China, Japan Apart*)

The Yasukuni Shrine was built to commemorate the dead, but since its construction, it has been cohesively and problematically tangled in nationalism and politics. For instance, in a popular children's board game in Japan, landing on a square that represented death also showed instant enshrinement at Yasukuni. The rhetoric of the board game effectively instilled nationalism in the children, teaching that dying for one's nation was true honor,

for it leads to a desirable reward: glorification at Yasukuni. This same rhetoric spread beyond the rectangular confines of a board game to lyrics of popular war songs. During World War II, Japanese soldiers sang:

You and I are cherry blossoms of the same year  
Even if we're far apart when our petals fall  
We'll bloom again in the treetops of the Capitol's Yasukuni Shrine.  
(Tsubouchi)

These are comforting lyrics. They persuade us to believe that there is no danger in death due to battle. Patiently bear the pain of temporary separation from your life and your comrades, for in the afterlife, your spirit will be rewarded. In time, your soul will break free from the fetters of your former body, from the suffocating soil of the earth; it will find the roots of a Yasukuni tree, travel up its trunk to its flowers: still tightly enclosed buds, then burst free in a bright, dazzling explosion. After this liberation, your spirit will be free to soar on the breeze winding through the swaying branches, then travel to the treetops, above the rustling leaves, to joyfully meet the souls you thought you had lost: it will be clear exhilaration.

The rhetoric of these lyrics takes advantage of the natural human urge for companionship and friendship. It takes advantage of the fears people face in thinking they will lose the ones they love, by offering an alternative – a reunion in the afterlife. This is what dying for one's country guarantees.

The nationalism that pervades the Yasukuni Shrine still pulses today. Items once used by the Japanese Imperial Army, such as war flags, are sold as souvenirs at a museum gift shop that sits to the north side of the Main sanctuary. While visiting the same museum, a visitor will discover a photograph, magnified “perhaps ten times” (Breen), of Justice Radhabinod Pal, the only judge at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal who thought the Japanese innocent of all war crimes. Thus, the Yasakuni Shrine affiliates itself not only with a pride in its soldiers or its people, but a nationalism that implies the innocence of their nation. This same nationalism is evident in the Yasakuni Shrine's official English website:

War is truly sorrowful. Yet to maintain the independence and peace of the nation and for the prosperity of all of Asia, Japan was forced into conflict. The precious lives that were lost in these incidents and wars are worshiped as the *Kami* (Deities) of *Yasukuni Jinja*.

Moreover, there were those who gave up their lives after the end of the Great East Asian War, taking upon themselves the responsibility for the war. There were also 1,068 “Martyrs of Showa” who were cruelly and unjustly tried as war criminals by a sham-like tribunal of the Allied forces (United States, England, the Netherlands, China and others). These martyrs are also the *Kami* of Yasukuni Jinja.

Finally, let us worship at Yasukuni Jinja and offer our gratitude to the Kami and resolve to become fine citizens of our nation. The white doves<sup>12</sup> that fly above the Jinja also await your visit . . . (*Yasukuni Jinja*)

Long ago, the Yasukuni Shrine decided not to extricate itself from nationalism and politics, but now it has gone a step further, to the point of rewriting history. In this sense,

---

<sup>12</sup> One species of dove is the Luzon Bleeding-heart (*Gallucolumba luzonica*), known for a stain of vivid, dark red at the center of its white breast. At first sight, it is hard to believe that the bird has not recently been wounded.

the Shrine merely functions as another textbook: its architectural lines and forms become the ink of the pages, and its visitors the readers who lap up its words. The Shrine has tied the act of commemorating the dead to loving one's country to exonerating murderers of crimes to denying history, so that its visitors cannot do one without doing the others. In this light, the Yasukuni Shrine has collapsed into a perversion of a memorial. While it was once a place for solemn remembrance and reverent gratitude, it now functions as a nationalist weapon and a political tool.

But there are no laws stating that a memorial must cleanly sever nationalism from the act of commemoration. However, there are definite guidelines memorials should follow, based solely on common ethical sense. Of these, the Yasukuni Shrine has violated at least one by refusing to acknowledge and attempting to rewrite history in the name of nationalism.

However, if we momentarily strip away Yasukuni's atmosphere choked with nationalism, we can evaluate how effective it is in its commemorative capacity – the main feature of most memorials. If memorials are meant to offer emotional healing or closure to those affected by the deaths they represent, how does the Yasukuni Shrine do, in this light? Is this particular ideology of the traditional memorial at least consistent with Yasukuni's? By offering the spirits of the *kami* a sacred resting ground that hums with serenity and eternally inscribing their names into the Book of Souls, the Yasukuni Shrine certainly does provide comfort to the ones grieving – whether they are loved ones or strangers – by ensuring that the dead will be forever remembered (or at least until the Shrine exists).

But though the Shrine heals, it also wounds those affected by what happened in Nanjing of 1937. Those who lost children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, lovers, spouses, friends – we can only wonder how they cope, how they are expected to heal, knowing that the very ones responsible for their losses are being worshipped and glorified. War memorials operate in the clause of Catch-22: if you commemorate a soldier, you will, at the same time, cause pain to the memory of those he killed during the course of battle. But if you do not commemorate the soldier, you erase the memory of his life, and essentially kill *him*, giving him a second death. For all memorials that commemorate the war dead, this dynamic is inevitable, not just limited to Yasukuni. In order to pay your respects to a dead soldier, you will offend those he killed. In most cases, those he killed were also trying to kill him.

This rhetorical cycle, however, cannot apply to certain *kami* at the Yasukuni Shrine. The lives taken by Japanese soldiers in Nanjing did not happen as an inevitable, natural result of battle. The enemies – the Chinese people – were not killed while defending their country, they had not been seeking the sweet reward of eternal enshrinement as *kami*; in reality, their lives were abruptly cut off, unjustly stolen. And Yasukuni does not only exonerate this crime, but even goes as far to glorify the criminal.

One form of rhetoric implies that society victimizes an inherently innocent individual. When creating the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in America, veterans in charge of its construction insisted that it be free of politics; they wanted viewers to “Honor the man, not the cause” (Wagner-Pacifici). By this framework, the man is innocent, only a victim of extenuating circumstance and inescapable dictation. However unfavorable the outcome

of war, the man should still be honored for his contribution to his country; his individual mistakes or faults should be disregarded. If this same concept of forgiving the man, regardless of how despicable his actions may have been, is applied to the Yasukuni Shrine, one is essentially forgiving unforgivable crimes against humanity, crimes of inhumane, horrific, grisly brutality – bloodshed that is *not* a natural result of war. However, unlike the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Yasukuni Shrine does not even ask us to forgive the atrocities the Japanese soldiers committed, but denies they even existed, instead glorifying the guilty as martyrs as well as intentionally distorting history. These conscious decisions of the Yasukuni Shrine are almost childlike; by denying the guilt of their soldiers, they are naively refusing to believe in the existence of the cruel, terrible capabilities of man.

With the Yasukuni Shrine, it is impossible to venerate the dead without accepting glorification of unjust murder. The memorial houses an internal conflict, a conflict that manifests externally into the conflict between nations. Because of its pride, the Yasukuni Shrine has been an impediment to healthy, international discourse, continuing to anger countries that were once (or still continue to be) victims of Japan's fatally imperialistic past. The title of the memorial has proved to be quite ironic.

### 3 *Nanjing counterattacks Tokyo*

Amidst the heated textbook controversy of the 1980s, and in retaliation to verbal denials of the Nanjing Massacre by certain Japanese officials and extremist groups, the Memorial for Commemoration of the Victims of the Japanese Military's Nanjing Massacre (*Qínhuá rìjūn nánjīng dàtúshā yùnnàn tóngbāo jìniànguān*) was built, covering an area of 28,000 square meters in an area within China's former capital. It is more than a little sad that it took threat to give proper recognition to the dead, as its construction was delayed by almost half a century, but that is another story.

The Memorial for Commemoration of the Victims of the Japanese Military's Nanjing Massacre (the Memorial) opened in the year of 1985. It is not a single structure, but rather a composite of several individual memorials, united by a shared ground and purpose. The Memorial also houses several non-monumental buildings, including one office, seven departments and sub-departments, including an administration office, and departments of research, exhibition, and supplies; it is also affiliated with the Research Association of the Nanjing Massacre by the Japanese Military. As a memorial, the Nanjing Memorial does not merely suggest history, but actively works to reflect it.

Though the Yasukuni Shrine and the Nanjing Memorial seem to occupy opposite ends of the spectrum – one honors the dead, the other the executioner – both are driven by an identical motive: the desire to reassert one's own historical truth while commemorating lives lost, all in one collective structure. Additionally, both memorials are tangled in nationalism. The Yasukuni Shrine was melded and evolved by Japanese nationalism, and the creation of the Nanjing Memorial was a Chinese nationalist reaction to that Japanese nationalism. Since both memorials share a rudimentary rhetorical framework, can the Nanjing Memorial escape the fate that befell the Yasukuni Shrine; can it succeed where it fails? Can it avoid gluing commemoration to patriotism; can it refrain from distorting history for the benefit and honor of one's own nation?

And can the Nanjing Memorial transcend those very pitfalls to become an “ideal” memorial, one that heals, not wounds? Does the Memorial successfully emerge from the chaos of the Massacre, its confusing, anxious, frightening makeup, to offer a calm presence, one that can finally bring closure to the event?

#### 4 *From the corpses the flowers grow*

The Memorial was built by Jiangdong Gate (meaning *Gate East of the River*), one of the mass execution sites during the Nanjing Massacre. It was built literally above the “Ten Thousand Corpse Ditch” (*wàn rén kēng*<sup>13</sup>), whose etymology is described by a nearby monument, carved from the relief of stone.

On December 16, 1937, the Japanese Army imprisoned ten thousand disarmed Chinese soldiers and civilians in the courtyard of the former Army Prison. That evening, the prisoners were escorted to Jiangdong Gate. The Japanese troops set massive fires to civilian houses to light up the area while employing heavy and light machine-guns to shoot the crowd . . . The victims fell one after another into pools of blood . . . A few months later, when the weather grew warmer and the bodies started to rot, charity burial societies buried the remains of more than ten thousand in two huge ditches. Therefore it is called ‘Ten Thousand Corpse Ditch’ (Yin 103).

In one black and white photograph taken only moments after the same massacre, a helmeted Japanese soldier surveys the scene. Rocky, uneven soil has been unearthed to form a long ditch that carries a river of tightly packed bodies. Left hand resting upon his belt, right hand lightly gripping a bayonet, the soldier gazes at the heaps made of parallels, diagonals, and perpendiculars filling in gaps. The glare of the sun glances off the dead bodies like flat rocks of a riverbed. A second photograph, taken in 1985 of the same location during the excavation of the Ten Thousand Corpse Ditch, shows that the clothed corpses have disintegrated into a saturated river of splintered bones, dotted with the roundness of skulls.

The colors of the Memorial, sitting upon the memories of thousands massacred, are bleak and somber. Buildings are carved from light grey granite, all inscriptions are composed of thick black brushstrokes, pines and cypresses of dark juniper green are ordered into grave, obedient rows. In order to enter, a visitor must first face and pass through – it cannot be ignored or walked around – a looming grey stone wall boldly declaring ‘300000’ and the word ‘victim,’ inscribed in Chinese, English, and Japanese. After descending stairs on the opposite side of the wall, one faces a bleak, barren desert, in which buildings and statues and monuments are isolated from each other by expanses of grey and beige cobblestone (or *eluanishi*, which literally translates to “goose<sup>14</sup> egg stone”). Withered trees are plunged into the hard sand, casting their shadows into streaks of grey shades that stretch across the expanse.

13 The character *kēng* (坑) as a noun can mean pit, hole, or tunnel; as a verb, it can mean ‘to bury alive.’

14 A Chinese legend explains the origin of the Lantern Festival, which occurs on the fifteenth of the first lunar month. In the legend, the Jade Emperor of Heaven had decided to destroy a town with a storm of fire for killing his favorite goose. A good-hearted fairy, hearing of the emperor’s impending vengeance, warned the townspeople to light lanterns throughout the town on the appointed day. The townsfolk listened and followed her instructions, and from the heavens, it looked as though the village was ablaze. Satisfied that his goose had already been avenged, the Jade Emperor did not destroy the town.

## 5 *Fossils, Lethe-proof*

In the southwest corner of the Memorial stands a building shaped in the form of a coffin (its roof is the lid, its half buried body mirrors paneled sides of oak), housing the bones excavated from the Ten Thousand Corpse Ditch. Inside, bones emerge from sand enclosed by large glass panels. Transparent folds of black cloth in the background, lit by the sun, are softer mirrors of the harsh contours of femurs and ulnas in the foreground. It is an aquarium of corpses. In one section of the exhibit, the bones have been kept in life's original connection, in jutting skeleton form, though some are missing skulls (those are scattered throughout the exhibit, gouged by bayonets, whispering of bullet holes). Grainy and dirt-encrusted, they look like enlarged bumps of sandpaper. Little cards with bold black numbers identify the skeleton as a number: in death, they are nameless, faceless, and unidentifiable. In another aquarium, instead of retaining human links, bones are scattered in protruding disarray, looking like centuries of driftwood collected from the sea. Body is no longer discernible from body, mirroring the fashion in which they were carelessly tossed in death. Facing these exhibits is facing concrete evidence of the Nanjing Massacre, meeting its tangible truth.

Is this display of the dead unethical? In order to create these memorials, bones were unearthed from the soil and placed on public display – this treatment could be considered disrespectful to the memory of the dead. But how could it be, when the earth that covered their bones was not a fitting or decent grave? The bones did not rest in peace; they were buried without the world's and their enemy's acknowledgement of their suffering and pain. They were shamed, then tortured, then suffocated in dirt reeking of injustice. To be broken free from this soil so that they can tell their stories – that is not disrespect but liberation.

The memory of the Nanjing Massacre has been in danger of being forgotten. The shocking display of chaotically strewn bones evokes in us a homeostatic desire to reconnect them, and simply by realizing this desire, we would simultaneously be piecing together the scattered, fading memories they represent. Thus, the shattered bones are literal representations of fragmented memory; to piece together these shards means to remember and commemorate the Massacre. "To dismember is to fragment a body and its memory; to remember is make a body complete" (Sturken). Consequently, the bones form a dichotomy of life and death<sup>15</sup>: if we, the visitors to the memorials, the ones still filled with potent life, keep passing on the stories of the dead – then the dead have not yet truly died. On one hand, this particular memorial is a grisly, jolting reminder of death, but on the other, it actively asks for a preservation and nurturing (multiplication) of life. The bones of the victims are more than mere endoskeletal remnants; they have life, if we allow it. With our voices, we can preserve them better than chemical preservatives ever could.

These bones form the rhetorical skeleton of the Nanjing Memorial. They remind us of what is most important: preserving the memory of the Massacre. Nothing can follow the absence of memory; if we cannot remember, then all the Memorial attempts to do is rendered meaningless.

---

15 Artist Damien Hirst places formaldehyde-drenched animal corpses into glass cases. These, too, are stark contradictions of life and death: they appear as they did when they were alive, yet they reek of the sterility of chemical preservatives. In one piece, a tiger shark is Hirst's corpse of choice. It floats in an aquarium of light, dirty turquoise gelatin, looking like a cross-section of the deep ocean. Its title is *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*.

6 *Complex numbers:  $a + bi$* 

An inscribed wall forms the southwest corner of the graveyard of the Memorial. Like the entrance wall, it is also meant to be shaped in the image of a tombstone, and it is also bleakly grey. However, in contrast to the entrance wall that so unflinchingly displays the number of the dead, this wall is instead inscribed with three thousand names of victims, each name representing ten thousand more. Whereas a ‘300,000’ evokes pure volumes of numbers, the names of this wall evoke associations with individual identities – it is more personal. Thin trees behind the monument softly place their leaved branches on the stone tops of the wall, seeming to peer down at the inscriptions below. A wreath of stone on the center bottom of the wall encircles one single Chinese character, *diàn*<sup>16</sup>, which means ‘to make offerings to the spirits of the dead.’ To grasp the enormity of the Nanjing Massacre is to possess the ability to imagine that each scribbled brushstroke, perhaps measuring only a few inches in length, holds the sufferings and deaths of ten thousand who once were alive. This ability to grasp quantity surely surpasses, or at least painfully stretches, the average powers of imagination.

Though perhaps more personal than the stark simplicity of the entrance wall, this monument continues to focus on numbers, the statistical magnitude of death. Three hundred thousand – the number that the Memorial has accepted as the factual death toll, has been a “highly charged issue” (Fogel xiv), a fiery point of controversy between the Massacre’s doubters and believers. At the highest range, the believers argue that more than “300,000 were killed and 80,000 raped,” and at the lowest end, Japanese extremists “argue that fewer than 100 were killed and very few raped” (6). Tanaka Masaaki, “the most vocal proponent of the extreme revisionist position” (Yamamoto 244), even dedicates seven of his seventeen chapters in his book *What Really Happened in Nanking: the Refutation of a Common Myth* to discussing the exact number of deaths.

The Memorial’s director, Chu Chengshan, states that one of the Memorial’s purposes is to “preserve historical truth and spread the seeds of peace” (*Qinhua rijun nanjing*). However, when it emphatically insists on the exact number of deaths through various monuments, the Memorial is essentially contributing another belligerent, heated voice to the controversy. If such accusations have repeatedly proven in the past to rouse defensiveness and patriotism from within Japan, can the Memorial honestly fulfill its claims to contributing to peace? If an insistence on an exact number has been unable to bring a repentant apology, is the Memorial effective in trying to establish a shared truth, a factual history?

Also, an emphasis on numbers may shift the focus from another important aspect of the Nanjing Massacre – the brutality of the murders. What was terrible about the Massacre were not only the vast quantities of death, but the cruel ways in which humans were killed. Historian Joshua Fogel has commented, “Whether 200,000 people were killed or 240,000 does not alter the dimensions of the horror” (Fogel 6). The obsessive focus on the number of the dead has often hindered the hopeful conclusion of China’s tension with Japan: the attainment of official apologies from the Japanese government and historians alike.

16 The eyes of one not well-acquainted with the Chinese language may see a similarity between the character *diàn* (奠) and the character *zhēn* (真), which means truth.

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 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 . . . the issue at stake was not in obtaining the exact figure but in admitting that what happened in Nanjing was both tragic and shameful (Yang 247).

As the monuments within the Memorial constantly indicate the numbers of the murdered, it seems to be impugning the Japanese, accusing them as the transgressors. By consciously rousing indignation and defensiveness from the very ones whom they seek an apology from, its claims to spreading peace are questionable, as it seems to hinder, rather than pave the way, to peace.

However, though the concept of numbers has proven to rouse controversy and verbal war, the blatant display of ‘300,000’ is necessary in the long run. The number is not merely a mathematical collection of digits, but a physical gauge of the war atrocities committed against the people of China. Eykholt connects the act of denying the number with the act of supporting “imperialist aggression”:

Japan was only the last in a line of aggressors that waged war on Chinese soil. Consequently, the Massacre joins a string of events, such as the Opium War and the burning of the Summer Palace, that represent the violence of imperialism, and death figures are a central part of the Massacre as a larger symbol of the destruction that foreign encroachment wrought on Chinese soil . . . Three hundred thousand deaths is more than just a number over which scholars argue. It is a multilayered symbol that for Chinese signifies the unjustified pain inflicted on China by Western and Japanese power . . . (Eykholt 49)

To forget these numbers is to forget, or disregard, the extent of a people’s suffering. Though the number itself is not the most important aspect of the Massacre, as it was the nature of the atrocities committed in the Nanjing Massacre that was the most terrifying aspect, the numbers still emphasize magnitude, thus emphasizing the magnitude of brutality. Thus, if it is important to stress the nature of the brutality, numbers are vital. Though they may incite controversy and worsen tension, the numbers on the monuments are important and do need to exist, if we truly desire a complete understanding of the Nanjing Massacre. An apology from the Japanese government for the true number of deaths would be infinitely better than an apology for a false one, even if more time and effort must be expended in attaining it.

The Memorial is at conflict. On one hand, it must truthfully attest to the brutality suffered by the murdered, and numbers are a necessary medium for emphasis. However, this desire to preserve historical truth comes at the cost of immediate conflict – anger, defensiveness, further polarization towards denial – instead of beginnings of peace, one of its stated goals. The Memorial must realize that these two desires are paradoxical, and thus it cannot have both. One must be forsaken to attain the other.

However, peace is attainable in the long run. But this more stable peace rests on healthy discourse between the two nations, and healthy discourse is only possible when the two nations share a basic historical framework. Only when the two nations agree on certain fundamental points, can they begin to examine, acknowledge, deal with the details of the Nanjing Massacre, and make progress towards peace. No single, static structure, like the Memorial, has the capacity to be a substitute for some necessary components for peace: an indeterminable period of time, layered with continual effort, justifiable compromise, and change. The Memorial must realize the limits of its capabilities, and not claim to fulfill what it does not.

7 *Even after death, the head of Orpheus still sang his mournful songs as it floated down the river Maritsa*

The Memorial effectively shocks visitors with reminders about the magnitude of the Nanjing Massacre. But it even more successfully sears onto the visitors' minds memories of the brutality for which the Massacre is infamous.

Beneath the '300,000' wall of the Memorial, resting on sandy-colored stones peppered with grey, is a sculpture of black bronze, slightly greening<sup>17</sup> at the edges. The sculpture is a severed head that seems to just have ceased rolling on the ground; a lock of damp hair, breathing its last humid breath, falls and rests on his forehead. His eyes roll back into this head, staring blankly. His mouth is slightly open, a swollen tongue pushing against teeth underneath tightly drawn lips. His skin is rough, tensing into lump folds, stippled with so many cavernous pits that it is hard to detect the slash running down diagonally from the left side of his nose to his left jaw.

Beheading was a common form of punishment employed by Japanese soldiers, and a method of death that had origins deep within the Japanese culture and traditions of the sword.<sup>18</sup> The soldiers "dwelled with great relish upon the sword as a weapon and as a *bushido*<sup>19</sup> spiritual symbol, inculcated by the military culture from the day a man became a soldier" (Yin 132). During wars, it was a form of initiation; after beheading his first victim, a soldier would be proving his courage and fearlessness, attaining the experience necessary to ultimately become a seasoned, honored war veteran. In his confession, former soldier Hakudo Nagatomi recounts his first experience with beheading.

*On my first day in China, back in 1937, I proved my courage by beheading twenty Chinese civilians. It is very hard to say this, but the truth of the matter is that I felt proud of Japan . . .*

*. . . the Japanese officer proposed a test of my courage. He unsheathed his sword, spat on it, and with a sudden mighty swing he brought it down on the neck of a Chinese boy cowering beside us. The head was cut clean off and tumbled away on the ground as the body slumped forward, blood*

17 Bronze is a copper alloy, which may form blue or blue-green salts after losing electrons that encircle its nucleus.

18 In 1645, famed swordsman Miyamoto Musahi wrote in *Go Rin No Sho* that the ideal warrior follows the "twofold way of pen and sword."

19 Eleven virtues associated with *bushido*:

義 – Gi – Rectitude	勇 – Yu – Courage	仁 – Jin – Benevolence
礼 – Rei – Respect	誠 – Makoto – Honesty	名誉 – Meiyo – Honor, Glory
忠義 – Chūgi – Loyalty	忠 – Chu – Preservation of ethics	智 – Chi – Wisdom
悌 – Tei – Care for the aged	孝 – Ko – Respect/piety to one's elders	

*sputting in two great gushing fountains from the neck. The officer suggested I take the head home as a souvenir. I remember smiling proudly as I took his sword and began killing people.* (Pitman)

Hiroki Kawano, a former Japanese military photographer, was a witness to the frequent beheading of Chinese soldiers and civilians alike.

*I've seen all kinds of horrible scenes . . . headless corpses of children lying on the ground. They even made the prisoners dig a hole and kneel in front of it before being beheaded. Some soldiers were so skillful that they took care of the business in a way that severed the head completely but left it hanging by a thin layer of skin on the victim's chest, so that the weight pulled down the body down to a ditch.* (Yin 132)

However, beheading was not merely a method of ending life, but a form of entertainment as well. A series of 'killing field' photographs taken on Nanjing's Pingshi<sup>20</sup> Street captures the exact moment a Japanese sword slices through the neck of a man. In the photograph, the head is weightless, floating several inches below where it should be; it is separated from its usual foundation by an empty sliver of cavernous black. A blank expression rests on the face no longer connected to the slumped body; with its legs slumped underneath, the corpse almost bows to the audience of Japanese soldiers. A multilayered circle of Japanese soldiers enclose the spectacle, their faces hidden underneath inky shadows below the brims of their caps; two can be seen taking photographs – the caption suggests “for souvenirs” (Yin 138). The man (or is it a corpse?<sup>21</sup>) is in a posture of quiet surrender – his hands are not tied behind him, but instead of resisting, they are placed softly on the tops of his knees. This same pose of defeat, in which the hands of the victims are neither tied nor used to fight, can be found in other photographs depicting beheadings. By surrendering to death, the victims are not only being murdered, but in a sense committing suicide at the same time.<sup>22</sup>

As a form of entertainment, beheading was not only a spectator sport but an interactive game. On December 13, 1937, the Japanese newspaper *Tokyo Nichinichi Shimbun* ran the headline: “Contest to kill first 100 Chinese with sword extended when both fighters exceed mark – Mukai scores 106 and Noda 105.”

*Two brave fighters of the Katagiri unit, Sub-lieutenant Toshiaki Mukai and Sub-lieutenant Takeshi Noda are in a rare race to kill 100 Chinese under the Purple Mountain outside Nanking. So far, Mukai has a score of 106 and his rival has dispatched 105 men. They greeted each other at noon.*

*Noda: Hi! My number is 105, what about you?*

*Mukai: 106 is my number!*

---

20 *Pingshi*, 平时, meaning ‘in normal times’ or ‘in peacetime.’

21 The issue of whether a decapitated head retains consciousness after separation from the body has been debated; however, no definite answer has been established.

22 Under the *bushido* ideal, if a samurai failed to uphold his honor (through defeat, disgrace, or mortal wounds) he could regain it by performing *seppuku* (ritual suicide). With *seppuku*, he could end his days with his transgressions erased and with his reputation enhanced. The samurai would plunge a knife into his abdomen, which was believed to release his spirit. Sometimes the samurai who was performing the act would ask a loyal comrade to cut his head off at the moment of agony.

*Both of them laughed heartily.*

*But the two contestants have found it impossible to determine which passed the 100 mark first. Instead of settling it with a discussion, they are going to extend the goal by 50.*

*Mukai's blade was slightly damaged in the competition. He explained that this was the result of cutting a Chinese in half, helmet and all. The contest was 'fun,' he declared, and he thought it a good thing that both men had gone over the 100 mark without knowing that the other had done so. (Yin 182)*

Survivors of such 'killing contests' have provided eyewitness accounts, consistent with the Japanese newspaper report. Tang Junshan, a shoemaker born in Nanjing, was twenty-two at the time of the Second Sino-Japanese war. He was discovered hiding in a trash bin by Japanese soldiers, who escorted him and a group consisting "entirely of civilians" (Honda 164) to the grounds of a clothing factory. There, they were divided into four equal groups and made to stand on the four sides of a pit that had already been dug. Tang recounts, "Four of the soldiers went around slicing off the heads of the people in their assigned group while the other four, including the collaborators, picked up the severed heads and lined them up. In other words, the four teams were having a head cutting contest" (164).

With this particular monument, the Memorial effectively evokes memories of one particular, ghastly form of murder. At the same time, by placing a statue of this nature in the Nanjing Massacre Memorial, it seems to imply that beheading was a form of torture specific to the Massacre, or that only the Chinese suffered at the blade of the Japanese sword. However, decapitation is a form of punishment stretching across the history of the world, responsible for deaths ranging from the Bible's John the Baptist to Seif Adnan Kanaan, who died at the hands of Iraqi terrorists in 2004 – it is certainly not limited to Japanese aggressors and Chinese victims.

In the Sino-Japanese War, some Chinese civilian and military leaders offered prizes for Japanese heads. As a result, Chinese soldiers mutilated the bodies of dead Japanese soldiers even prior to the first major battle of war in mid-September 1894. (Yamamoto 23)

Thus, the presence of such a statue is hypocritical, for Japan could use the same exact statue as a memorial to their own murdered soldiers from the first Sino-Japanese war. However, in the previous example, the act of removing the head was less brutal in that it was done to corpses, not to those still alive. Distinguishing features of the beheading of the Nanjing Massacre were its frequency as a method of death, the ritual of initiation associated with it, and its use as a form of entertainment – features that cannot be applied in rhetorical defense.

Still, the Memorial must avoid hypocrisy at all costs, for the past foreshadows and warns of its potential danger. The past has shown that when small errors regarding the history of the Nanjing Massacre are made, certain Japanese groups descend upon the error, vulture-like, to discredit it. They then use the error as justification to disregard the entire evidential basis of the Nanjing Massacre, hoping to ultimately bleach away an unwanted stain from Japanese history.

It has become a preoccupation of some [Japanese nationalist historians] to expose the technical discrepancies in existing accounts of the Japanese atrocities in Nanjing, however minor they may be, and to immediately claim, explicitly or implicitly, that the whole incident was “made up.” The recent backlash against inclusion of records of Japanese aggression and atrocities in many war museums in Japan largely deployed similar tactics. Inaccurate photographs or video clips showing Japanese atrocities became an excuse to remove entire sections. (Yang 242)

The Memorial, as well as all historians, must be painstakingly meticulous in portraying history accurately. One small error could potentially capsize its entire mission. One small error could push one audience to impenetrable close-mindedness, make them withdraw even deeper into their shells,<sup>23</sup> the barrier that obstructs them from acknowledging and atoning for past atrocities.

## 8 *Enantiomorph*

What is worse than misrepresenting history, though, is widely transmitting this distortion.

In the past, the Chinese government has used the Nanjing Massacre as a “political tool” to keep public attention focused on development and unity.

Any doubts about this were dispelled in 1996 when the Communist party, fearful that Chinese people were ignoring this monument to the glory of the Communist strength and wisdom, made visits to the Memorial mandatory for schoolchildren. This was part of a larger program to reenergize loyalty to the Party among Chinese citizens. The Memorial is one more way that the Chinese government asserts its control over how people commemorate the war with Japan. (Eykholt 36)

Sadly, the Nanjing Memorial has somehow become like Yasukuni, unable to separate commemoration from patriotism.

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. (Yang, *Challenges*)

On its official website, it even proudly lists the awards it has earned: “Advanced Institution in Building Spiritual civilization in the Nation,” “Model Foundation for National Patriotic Education,” “National Patriotic Education for Middle and Elementary School of Students” . . .

If anything should emerge from the Nanjing Massacre, it should be the memories of the lives lost. These lives can and should be remembered without needing to glorify one’s country. A bridge between commemoration and patriotism does not exist naturally; it must be intentionally formed. The victims of the Massacre are first and foremost tied together by their shared suffering, and not an ethnic identity. To honor the dead is to tell their individual stories, recognizing their distinct identities as human beings. Remembering the

---

<sup>23</sup> When snails are retracted into their shells, they secrete a type of mucus that when dried, covers the entrance of their shells, forming a trapdoor-like structure called the operculum. Operculum powder is a crucial ingredient of incense in both China in Japan.

In China, incense is burnt at the graves of ancestors as a New Year tradition. In Japan, incense holds a vital role in Buddhist and Shinto shrine ceremonies and rites. It is thought to be a method to purify the surroundings.

diversity of those who died helps us understand more accurately the true extent of loss. If we fall into patriotism, and treat the dead as a collective country, the uniqueness of their individual identities dissipates, and we cannot understand that the death toll of the Nanjing Massacre is more than a mere number.

Since it has the authority to educate the youth of the nation, the Memorial must be serious about its responsibility to preserve historical truth. When reaching out to minds of future generations, future transcribers of history, future determiners of history, all must respect and keep the history of the Nanjing Massacre intact. It is unavoidably immoral and regressive to use historical tragedy for individual benefit or as a means to attain patriotic unification. The Nanjing Memorial, lured by the same temptations as the Yasukuni Shrine, is inching nearer to committing the same crime, that of rewriting history.

When describing its aesthetic appearance on its official website, the Nanjing Memorial states that the black and white granite of its architecture forms the pages of a history book. But wait, history books been mentioned before – the Memorial itself was borne out of the textbook controversy, and it furthermore fights textbook with textbook, similarly seeking to inscribe its version of truth onto an eternally historical record. It does not seem a coincidence that its rhetoric mirrors that of the enemy. But by employing an identical expression of fierce resistance, it must avoid the fate that befell the rhetoric: succumbing to shamelessly disfiguring history for individualistic gain, and thus being rendered an ineffective, meaningless symbol.

### 9 *The mixed ancestry of the thousand armed: a brief interlude*

For a moment, we will travel across the East Sea.

Along the coastline of Japan, warm breezes from the salty sea and natural volcanic springs bathe the steep mountains of Atami, which in Japanese literally means ‘hot ocean.’ Deep within Mount Izu, damp foliage wraps itself around a statue of Koa Kannon, *bodhisattva* of compassion in Asian Buddhism, known as *Guanyin* in China and the Goddess of Mercy in the west. She stands upon a lotus flower,<sup>24</sup> light cloth draped across her body, pressing her hands together in a posture of prayer. A trace of serene concern can be detected in her eyes and in the slight tautness of her brow.

She was molded by the hands of potter Shibayama Seifu, who was commissioned by General Iwane Matsui to build such a shrine in his hometown. Matsui was personally appointed by Emperor Hirohito in 1937 to be commander of the Japanese Shanghai Expeditionary Force during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The clay that formed her form had been shipped to Japan from the battlefields of Central China; it was stained with the blood of both Japanese and Chinese soldiers. Tanaka Masaaki rhetorically asks, incredulousness buzzing through his words, “Would an officer as honorable and ethical as General Matsui have ordered or sanctioned the massacre of 300,000 Chinese?” We are

---

<sup>24</sup> The roots of a lotus are embedded in the mud, the stem grows up through the water, and the heavily scented flower lies above the water, basking in the sunlight. In Buddhism, the lotus is the symbol of the progress of the soul from the “primeval mud of materialism . . . the waters of experience...into the bright sunshine of enlightenment” (The Lotus).

supposed to fall into harmony with his words, believing wholeheartedly when he tells us that “Matsui Iwane was the most illustrious Japanese officer of his time . . . the man whom I respected than anyone else on earth” (Tanaka 2). Masaaki is diligently<sup>25</sup> or desperately trying to gather honor (scattered from shame and scandal) the general had lost when he was sentenced to be hanged at Sugamo Prison, perhaps because of personal love. For when Masaaki hears this fate, decided by the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, he claims to have been so devastated that he was unable to eat.

To Masaaki, Matsui’s gesture of building this memorial, with the very representation of compassion, is the very act of compassion. He claims that Matsui was a “staunch advocate of a united Asia” (Masaki); thus, allowing Chinese and Japanese blood to mix into a single entity reveals that Matsui saw the Chinese and Japanese as equals – how, then, could Matsui allow such a bestial, animalistic slaughtering of the Chinese to occur? Japan has no reason to apologize for wartime atrocities that according to Masaaki, are nothing more than the “falest of falsehoods” (Masaki).

*Onsen* (Japanese hot spring) water is often thought to have healing powers, according to its mineral properties. In this area filled with promises of purification and cleansing by saturated steam, filtered through miniature crystals of calcium and lithium, Kannon stands, facing the direction of Nanjing. Kannon, the symbol of mercy. Who is she forgiving?

Matsui’s Buddhist confessor Hanayama wrote of the conversation he had with Matsui on either November 29 or December 9:

*I am ashamed of the Nanking Incident...I participated in the Russo-Japanese War as a captain, but the division commanders at the time and now are totally different. In the Russo-Japanese War, the handling of the captives and other managements were excellent. But it did not go like that this time . . .*

*After the memorial service, I gathered up everybody and warned them with tears of anger. Both Prince Asaka and Lieutenant General Yanagawa were there. [I told them] we came all the way to stand on the majesty of the Emperor, but the dignity [of the Imperial Army] was lost at a stroke through the brutal acts of the soldiers. But then everyone laughed. To my displeasure, a certain division commander even uttered, ‘of course.’ (Xu)*

Kannon stands, a symbol of compassion, facing Nanking. Built by Matsui, who was responsible for the takeover of the city of Nanjing, who later confessed his guilt and shame. Masaaki sees no connection, instead replacing Kannon with the image of his hero, unable to tear himself away from Iwane Matsui’s personal claims to him that “he had never heard a word about a massacre in Nanking until the Tokyo Trials began” (Masaki 5).

The blood of the victim and the aggressor bleed into the same clay. The blood of the murdered is mixed with his murderer, abruptly severed from his homeland, his necessary grave, fated to forever stay on foreign soil that buzzed with the desire of expansion and conquest of his home and family. Then he is subject to claims, coming from those such as Masaaki, that this punishment only reveals the kindness and compassion of a general

---

<sup>25</sup> *What Really Happened in Nanking: The Refutation of a Common Myth* is Masaaki’s fifth book on the same subject.

who led the attacks. He is sculpted into a symbol of mercy, which is something he was denied. The blood in the statue must be writhing in despair.

Japanese troops were supposed to be devout Buddhist believers. When they entered a Buddhist temple, they burned incense and prostrated themselves before the images of the Buddha. Most soldiers had the insignia of the temple stamped on their bags or uniforms. They prayed to deities for their safety, and even had Buddhist priests of their own (Xu 110).

In Nanjing of 1937, there were more than “three hundred Buddhist temples with some one thousand monks and nuns in the cities” (110). Nothing prevented the death that pervaded the city from seeping into the sacred, religious grounds.

*On the third day, Japanese soldiers came to the temple looking for girls and spotted Monk Long Hui. Monk Long was a Manchu in his forties, of white complexion and without moustache or beard. They mistook him for a woman and stripped off his clothes. When they found him a male, they were angry and pulled him naked to the stone terrace by the gate where they dashed him against the stones and broke his skull.*

*The Japanese soldiers who violated these women and girls also forced others to do so. One Japanese soldier guarding Zhonghua gate forced Chinese passers-by to follow suit after he himself raped a girl. Whoever refused was killed. When a monk arrived on the scene the Japanese soldier told him to “enjoy, enjoy,” but the monk closed his palms and chanted: “I put my trust in Buddha Amita.” The Japanese ridiculed him and cut off his penis. The monk writhed in pain for some time before bleeding to death. It was a time of suffering for Chinese Buddhists. (115)*

Through their actions, the Japanese soldiers suggest a separation between piety and war, stating that they are two distinct concepts that can be exercised in isolation from each other.

In the balmy forests of Atami, Kannon strives to be a memorial. She was sculpted out of good intention, but this intention stemmed from naiveté. Mixing the blood of the Chinese and Japanese war dead, she candidly calls for peace. But mixing disparate sources of blood<sup>26</sup> does not dissolve the separation between the murderer and the murdered. It may appear to create literal homogeneity and metaphorical unification, but it cannot blend and erase the identity of the victim; the markers on red blood cells do not disappear so easily. Though she sought to be a noble memorial in the beginning, in the end, she became a symbol of hypocrisy, a tool of nationalism, and an offering to grief instead of peace. Her original function has become completely deleted.

The Yasukuni Shrine is a reflection of the statue of Kannon, sharing the same lofty intention but terrible destiny. The serene architecture of Yasukuni, embossed with fragile chrysanthemums, is only a metamorphosis of what laid hidden beneath the cold, hard cocoon of the bodhisattva.

But if the Nanjing Memorial is not careful, Kannon could instead metamorphose into one mammoth, weighty mass of dry cobblestone, skeletal remains, and withered trees,

---

<sup>26</sup> Blood transfusions can end in disaster (hemolytic anemia, renal failure, shock, and death) when blood from incompatible groups is mixed together. This occurs because the body, in an “immune response,” generates antibodies against unfamiliar antigens, which only end up destroying the infused blood.

winged with slates of black and grey granite. The Memorial must halt its rhetoric that increasingly adopts the form of Yasukuni's, if it does not want a similar fate.

We now return to the Nanjing Memorial.

### 10 *Black-figure pottery technique*

Relief sculptures form a wall that encloses the southern side of the Memorial. This memorial consists of uneven slates of rocky panels joined together in front of thin, tall trees. The pieces of rough granite have been divided into three main panels, each section given a distinct name and shape, but unified under a common theme, as all show different aspects of a single event – the Massacre.

The first panel, named *Jiánán* (劫, 劫, meaning to plunder or coerce; *nán*, 难, meaning *disaster*), closely resembles battle scenes depicted on *amphoras* or *kraters*, ancient Greek vases, sharing the same visual features of positioning the figures of bodies so that their torsos uniformly face the viewer, but their heads are turned to display the rigid angles of their profiles. Humiliation and subjugation are uniquely carved into this piece, into the folds of cloth and sharp turns of limbs jutting from the stone. Harsh cords of rope<sup>27</sup> run horizontally parallel through the length of the panel, girding bodies to each other, herding the victims as they march in a procession of death. Faint traces of chain link texture in the background further intensify the atmosphere of oppression. The hands of the prisoners are battered, either bound behind their backs or showing palm up in desolate defeat.

Some figures are hunched over, withdrawing into themselves as they close their eyes, shadows falling and erasing their faces. Others manifest the internal torture they feel through the twists of their mouths that distort silent screams. All have their eyes closed, either determinedly refusing to see, or blinded by the splinters of rope bound around their heads. The texture of the panel consists of the smoothness of youthful skin to the deep wrinkles outlining the skulls of the old. At least one prisoner is already dead: his hands are tied and secured to the highest part of the stone wall; in death, his head tipped forwards, folding the torso upon its emaciated stomach, his legs pulling down his body like weights, stretching out his body. Viewers see no face but the back of his drooping skull.

On the second bleak panel, titled *Túshā*, (屠杀, meaning butchery), extreme chaos has manifested through the scattered confusion of limbs. Bodies are strewn across sharp fragments of stone looking like broken glass; a man's head with the eyes gouged out is located in a central crack, masks of faces are flung onto the stone without bodies, headless bodies tighten in anguish. Looking like it was carelessly thrown, a body is folded across the top of the memorial. A screaming mouth emerges from the rocky wall, pushing against a placenta of stone. Legs fold without anatomical order, looking like elastic limbs of dolls.

To pose again the question we asked in the very beginning: as a memorial, does the Nanjing memorial offer emotional comfort to those affected by the loss of death? After seeing these panels of stone, the answer cannot be yes. The walls of the memorial, irreversibly etched with butchery and knife-edged pain, seek to shock and unsettle us, evoke in us an even

---

<sup>27</sup> The ancient Egyptians, probably the first civilization to develop special tools to make rope, generally made their ropes with fibers of the water reed plant. Ropes were a vital instrument helping the Egyptians move the heavy stones required to build their monuments, such as pyramids.

deeper sense of grief. The Memorial does not try to offer us closure on the Massacre; it wants us to realize how terribly and brutally lives were ended, it wants us to feel an anguish sharpened by knowing that those lives were taken without purpose. The Memorial implies that if we seek some sort of healing process, we must take matters in our own hands – the dead are already dead, we are the only ones who can seek justice for them.

But what form does this justice take? Will an act of contrition from the perpetrator suffice? An apology does seem to be one end the Memorial seeks: an offering of apology, hundreds of origami cranes<sup>28</sup> are strung together with colored thread at the entrance to the indoor exhibits, carefully folded into avian shape by visiting Japanese students. With this miniature, delicate memorial, the Memorial implies that it accepts and encourages the act of apology.

And indeed, not only the Memorial, but the rest of China has shown that it desires nothing more than repentance, implying an association between regret and closure.

When Azuma Shiro, former soldier and participant in the Rape of Nanking and eventual confessor, died of cancer, China expressed condolences and sympathy to his relatives. Qin Gang, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, explained why he earned such sympathy from China, despite his role in the terror and brutality of the Massacre:

Half a century later, Azuma had the courage to review the history of the aggression, defend the truth, and apologize to the victimized country, so his sense of justice and efforts to promote Sino-Japanese relations win our respect. (*Nanjing Pays Tribute to 'Conscience of Japan'*)

Even Nanjing Massacre survivor Jiang Fugen – whose five family members were killed by Japanese soldiers – stated that “I used to hate the Japanese so much . . . but when I saw the old Azuma in tears, bowing and kneeling before us in repentance, I couldn’t hold back my tears” (Pitman). China has proved to be willing to forgive, but forgiveness cannot occur and progress cannot be made when no sincere apology or repentance exists.

But let’s say an apology finally emerges from the hesitating mouths. What happens next?

Apologies are expressions of regret, but can regret offer closure on human tragedy? They cannot place tragedies in the past (especially ones executed with such gruesomeness) to fossilize as a moment in history that merely came and went. Catastrophes cannot be compacted; their reverberations will forever ring throughout all of history. Official recognition of the Nanjing Massacre and subsequent statements of regret cannot erase its terror and sorrow. Apologies, however noble the intent, cannot offer a satisfying, just closure. Thus, what is left for the Memorial to seek?

---

<sup>28</sup> The story of a young Japanese girl, Sadako Sasaki, explains how the paper crane earned its status as an international symbol of peace. Sadako Sasaki was only two when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. At age eleven, she was diagnosed with leukemia, a disease that occurred more due to radiation in the atmosphere because of the atomic bomb. Her best friend told her about an old Japanese legend that said anyone who folded a thousand paper cranes would be granted any wish. Sadako’s only wish was to get well so that she could run again. She started to work on the paper cranes and completed over 1000 before dying on October 25, 1955 at the age of twelve.

In China, cranes have long symbolized longevity, and often appear in artworks as carrying the souls of the departed to heaven after death.

11 *Sometimes Ino's reflection, sometimes her mirror opposite*

*A nation is not conquered until the women's hearts lay on the ground.*

– Cheyenne Indian saying

In the same area of the Memorial as the coffin-shaped building, a statue looms high above the house of bones. Standing on the precipice of action, knees bent, she is ready to spring from the pebbles with which she shares the same sandy color. She is a vertical opposite to the horizontal passivity of scattered bones. Her right hand is clutched in a large, Rodin-esque fist; her left hand is sharply splayed. Subtly lined cords can be seen hard under the skin of her neck, and she seems completely unaware of her robe that has been torn across her chest. If it were not for her face, her body could be easily mistaken for a man's. The strands of her hair, wet with sweat, damply gather into a loose bun that is falling apart at the nape of her neck. Her face parallels the essence of her body: her brow is furrowed in determination, her eyes blaze fiercely. The title of this sculpture is *Muqin*, or *Mother*.

Though titled *Mother*, no tangible feature of the statue seems to point at a maternal identity. Her hands are empty, not leading a child; her arms are empty, no infants rest at her breast. This particular memorial, attesting to female power, solely links the concept behind the word *Mother* and adjectives synonymous to *strength*. What could be the Memorial's explanation behind this particular connection?

The Nanjing Massacre is not known as the Rape of Nanking without reason. Its name rose from the vast numbers of a particular crime for which the Massacre is most remembered.

According to the judgment of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), "approximately 20,000 cases of rape occurred within the city during the first month of the occupation" (Yin 193). And this is a low figure – other statistics have pointed to 80,000.

It seems as though nothing stood in the way of the Imperial Japanese Army's assaults on women. Yomiuri Shimbun military correspondent Yukio Omata testified that "There was hardly any soldier who did not commit rape. Most of [the women] were raped and then were killed after the act" (186).<sup>29</sup> Age was certainly no deterrent: "In some cases, the Japanese sliced open the vaginas of preteen girls in order to ravish them more effectively" (Chang 91). Young girls to elderly women were frequent victims of rape.

The IMTFE continues, "Many cases of abnormal and sadistic behavior in connection with these rapes occurred. Many women were killed after the act and their bodies were mutilated" (Yin 186). Li Kehen, an eyewitness in Nanjing, wrote in *The Five Months Following the Fall of Nanking* that "There [were] so many bodies on the street, victims of group rape and murder. They were all stripped naked, their breasts cut off, leaving a terrible dark brown hole; some of them were bayoneted in the abdomen, with their intestines spilling out alongside them; some had a roll of paper or a piece of wood stuffed in their vaginas" (Xu 195).

Aware of the terror and danger, the women of Nanjing desperately tried to elude their fate, searching for ways in which they could protect themselves.

---

<sup>29</sup> The Samurai cult of the *bushido* "had no place for women, except as hostages or spoils of war" (Honda).

Almost all the young women had their faces smeared with soot from the bottom of cooking pots, and dressed in old, ragged oversized jackets making themselves look dirty, old, and ugly. Some of the girls cut their hair and disguised themselves as young men. . . . One 82-year-old woman, Ding Rongsheng, told the author that when she was hiding in the safety zone she did not wash her face for a whole month. Many of the other women, in order to avoid being raped, pasted lots of medicinal plasters all over their bodies. When the Japanese soldiers saw them, they turned away with disgust. At first this worked . . . (Chang)

But these attempts could not save them in the end. They were defenseless against the Japanese soldiers; women were violated and mutilated without regard to location: in the streets, in alleyways, even in front of family members. On Friday, December 17, a foreign resident wrote in his diary that “Another [woman] had her five-year-old infant deliberately smothered by the brute to stop its crying while he raped her” (Xu). And even worse: “Fathers [were forced to] rape their own daughters, brothers their sisters, sons their mothers” (Chang 95). There seemed no limit to human degradation and sexual perversion. And those who tried to resist were tortured by familiar, commonly employed methods. Xue Jialin, survivor of the Nanjing Massacre, testified:

*Japanese soldiers came to our village and forced me to lead them to where ‘flower girls’ hid. I would rather die than do this kind of inhuman thing. I refused and angered them. An officer cut my lips open with his sword and chopped off my teeth. (Yin 214)*

A picture of Xue Jialin accompanies his testimony.

Photographs are instrumental to the proof of the Rape of Nanking. These photographs show victims in the very process of being raped, victims forced to pose either before or after violation, and mutilated corpses of rape victims – it is unquestionable, irrefutable evidence. In one, a woman pulls down her shirt, clearly crying; her face is twisted in painful distress, eyes looking down. Her pants have been taken off, exposing her genitalia. In another photograph, also taken by the perpetrators themselves, a woman is bound to a chair in a spread eagle: her arms and legs are tied to fully expose. It is unclear whether she is dead or alive. Her mouth is slightly open, gaping, a black slit in a swollen face. She is naked except for her stockinged legs and petite, cloth shod feet. She is a victim of gang rape: the caption states that she was “repeatedly raped by Japanese army men”<sup>30</sup> (Yin 197).

Photographs of such nature are placed within the Memorial’s indoor exhibits, functioning as a graphically explicit, incontestable memorial. With these images, the Memorial cleanly and frankly draws a line between the identity of the victim and the identity of the perpetrator, placing blame unabashedly. Even its name, *The Memorial Hall for Victims of the Japanese Military in the Nanjing Massacre*, reminds visitors of exactly who, and only who, should be blamed for the Rape of Nanking.

However, the mass raping of women during wartime is not unique to Nanjing, 1937. For instance, in 1971, Pakistani soldiers raped an estimated 200,000–400,000 women

---

<sup>30</sup> When going through captured stores on Peliliu and Okinawa, many years after the Massacre, historian Frank Gibney discovered a “quantity of condoms regularly issued by the army to its soldiers. On the wrapping of each was a picture of a Japanese soldier charging with the bayonet. The caption below simply read Totsugeki – “Charge!” (Honda xx)

in Bangladesh after a failed rebellion. And there was Rwanda. There was the former Yugoslavia, too. And now there is the Republic of Congo – have you heard about it?

When the Memorial, in seeking the origin of responsibility, points at who they believe the culprit to be, they only succeed in revealing a deeper, unsolvable problem that befalls all humanity – a universal genderization of genocide. War somehow creates an archetypal ritual, in which the violation of rape somehow becomes a statement of conquest – the woman becomes a tool of rhetoric. The universality of this phenomenon is a source of terrifying mystery, and an accusation against the perceived enemy is in reality an accusation against all humanity. Believing itself to deconstruct the chaos of the Massacre, the Memorial only confirms our fears – the fear of man’s capability to hurt and inflict such pain.

And there are no words that can express this agony of rape. Can anything convey the haunting memories that never leave the victim’s body, her senses, her heart “that races and skin that crawls whenever something resurrects the only slightly buried terror” (Brisson 44)? In the face of such destruction, language fails, and rhetoric does not exist.

Rape is an excruciating, searing violation of the mind and the body. No one can “survive” a rape. No one can keep her former self intact; no one can return to the life she once had. Rape is a disintegration of the self, and so in a sense, death. As one rape victim expressed, “I will miss myself as I always was” (38). Rape is more than brief physical suffering; its aftermath is an isolation in which pain heightens and throbs, agony that cannot be measured by time. She finds herself afraid. She has nightmares that overlap with reality. She feels inexplicable guilt, she feels the stifling weight of shame. She feels forever tarnished, desecrated, soiled. And nothing can slow down the anxiety and fear quickly pulsing through her blood.

The immediate psychological responses [to rape] . . . include terror, loss of control, and intense fear of annihilation. Long term effects include the physiological responses of hypervigilance, heightened startle response, sleep disorders, and more psychological, yet still involuntary, responses of depression, inability to concentrate lack of interest in activities that used to give life meaning, and a sense of foreshortened future. (48)

Testifying to the repercussions of rape, one victim has said:

*For the first several months after my attack, I led a spectral existence, not quite sure whether I had died and the world went on without me, or whether I was alive but in a totally alien world. The freedom to move about in the world without debilitating fear, and any hope of returning to the pleasures of life as they once knew it . . . (9)*

Now multiply it all by 80,000. And that is only Nanjing.

How painful it must be to believe that you live in a world in which you can be attacked in any place, in any moment of time, simply because you are a woman. The universalism of what the Rape of Nanking represents – crime stemming from gender – is a significant contributor to the damage caused by the Massacre. Additionally, another such universal concept that worsens the pain is the inability to speak of it. Taboos, a culturally-instilled phenomenon, not limited to any one nation, prevented many rape victims

from speaking of the incident. While interviewing survivors of the Rape, journalist Honda Katsuichi noted:

*I was surprised at how many women I met in the course of my journey who had been raped by Japanese soldiers. Yet it was rare for the victims to talk of these humiliating experiences in any detail, even though they had happened in the distant past. This kind of reticence is not something unique to Chinese women, but the fact that I was a man and had also come from the same country as the Japanese soldiers made it all the more difficult for them to talk. (Honda 21)*

Chang agrees, stating, “Not a single Chinese woman has to this day come forward to admit that her child was the result of rape” (Chang 89).

Perhaps this inability to speak was no less painful than the physical excruciation of violation itself. Perhaps this suppression of pain, this seething of silent humiliation and anguish, was what made the Rape as terrible as it was. Perhaps the statue of the woman is not standing tall in her determination to live, but walking bravely, fearlessly, to a different fate, one that waited in water: between 1937 and 1938, “a German diplomat reported that ‘uncounted’ Chinese women were taking their own lives by flinging themselves into the Yangtze River” (90). The emotional and physical devastation of the Rape cannot be captured. The trauma cannot be fit into any symbolic system, for there is no logic behind such an atrocity, and there is no way to convey the damage done to the women in Nanjing (or anywhere else).

Unable to speak, she instead expresses her agony through destruction, creating death herself, death not represented by some official death-toll statistic, death that is only a fragment of a cycle.

Unable to bear the humiliation, the girls’ mother ordered them to commit suicide, forcing them to drink a mixture of fuel oil and cheap liquor. The girls became feverish, collapsed, and rolled on the floor in agony. At that moment, the next group of Japanese soldiers showed up, and the mother strangled her daughter with her own hands. (Honda 117-118)

Many children were secretly killed . . . numerous half-Japanese children were choked or drowned at birth. (Chang 89)

Conflict resides within the bodies of the children of the Rape. The weight of wreckage, despair, and inexplicable terror contained in one droplet of their blood is unimaginable.

What suffering, what excruciating pain, what fear, what terror the women of Nanjing went through. It was so terrible that they could not say. And since they could not say, we will never even come close to knowing, to understanding. And if we do not know, how can we accurately represent it within a memorial, within rhetoric? A single sand-colored statue and a smattering of photographs cannot serve as memory to the suffering of the women who were raped. Nothing exists that can encompass the devastation and sorrow of the Nanjing Massacre.

If human catastrophe is a supernova, no memorial can strive to be a black hole, condensing tragedy into a mere metonym.

The Memorial must realize that in the face of human tragedy, all rhetoric and language fails.

12 *Confucius: The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step*

In the northeastern area of the Memorial, the footprints of over sixty survivors, cast on bronze blocks, were assembled piece by piece to form a stretch of pavement forty meters in length and 1.6 meters in width. Two blackened statues of survivors stand by the ground imprinted by those who walked out of the Nanjing Massacre alive.

The figure of one statue is pulling down the neck of her blouse to reveal a scar, her face contorted by choking tears. The other, balancing with a cane, softly gathers the rippled folds of cloth to reveal scars on her lower leg. In contrast to the fearless and giant *Mother*, these are frail, small, battered, and old, who though they have survived, are deeply and forever scarred by the past. Though these sculptures are a representation of life, it is a life exhausted and dejected. The physical frailness of these sculptures reminds us also of the fragility of their legacies, and the fear they must feel in knowing that their stories may not be remembered or believed. Showing their scars (the memories of the Massacre are encoded in their flesh), they quietly (but desperately) point at the tangibility of their evidence, hoping to win our trust and loyalty. In contrast to the *Mother* sculpture, a symbol of maternal care, these sculptures, fragile and small, seem to invite our maternal care, inciting within us a desire to protect, somehow help.

The bronze blocks of footprints are greater than what they appear to be; there is a depth to the small tablets carefully pressed with tiny feet, the small toes sometimes curled. We can only understand the power of each bronze block when we learn of the story of the one who possessed the footprints.

One survivor, Peng Yuzhen, who was eighty five when imprinting eternal forms of her feet, tells her story:

One day after the Japanese army occupied Nanjing, I went to the river at Bailuzhou to wash diapers. A Japanese soldier on the city wall saw me and fired at me, injuring my right leg. Blood streamed down from my leg and I couldn't move, simply lying on ground. Later, my husband Peng Zhaoxi rescued me home. Since then, my right leg [has been] disabled.  
(*Qinhua rijun nanjing*)

The nature of Peng Yuzhen's story merits a second look at her bronze block. Indeed, her left footprint is visibly pressed cleanly into the mold, whereas her right footprint is withered and shrunken, shorter and thinner than the left; instead of smooth contours, the right footprint is textured like leaves. Memories of lives fill the creases of the prints on the blocks. Through the creation of this memorial, survivors have immortalized a piece of their souls, transferring their own spirits and the spirits of the dead to be contained within the vibrating atoms<sup>31</sup> of cast metal. This memorial acknowledges and proposes a solution to the inevitable physicality of the body, for next year, 2007, will mark the seventieth year anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre.

The sculptures of the survivors look to you, their eyes in their tilted faces filled with beseeching, to remember them. And how can you not? They did not survive the Massacre just to be killed by different death: the memories of their suffering erased and forever purged from history.

---

31 In Greek, atom means 'indivisible.' It is the smallest possible particle of a chemical element that retains its chemical properties.

But remembering them, mourning them is all we can do. If you were not in Nanjing in the year 1937, you cannot understand the devastation that befell the people of the city. You cannot imagine the extent of their suffering. You cannot feel the pain they felt. You cannot seek justice for them, because there is nothing that can redeem what was lost. Apologetically, we must confront the statues that gaze so sadly at us, and tell them the truth: we can do nothing more.

### *13 Columbidae*

On December 13, 1994, a woman, a young girl, and a little boy stand in front of the entrance wall to the Memorial, infamously emblazoned with three hundred thousand. Seeking the blessing of the dead before they begin to share their stories to the unwitting world in the film *The Rape of Nanking*, they release three white doves at the same time, each cluster of white fluttering flashes a hundred thousand souls, may they rest in peace.

Nobel laureate Elie Weisel has said that to forget a holocaust is to kill twice.

The amnesia that surrounds the Nanjing Massacre is the second rape.

We cannot allow a third.

*Author's note: With the help of my father, I translated the following from Chinese to English: inscription on the 'Ten Thousand Corpse' memorial (in section four), Nanjing Memorial director Chu Chengshan's mission statement (section six), the Memorial's description of its facilities (in section three) and aesthetic structure (in section eight), and the names of awards the Memorial has won (section eight).*

## Works Cited

- Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Inferno*. Vol. 1. Ed., Trans. Robert M. Durling. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Bezlova, Antoaneta. "Few Objects as Censors Ban Controversial 'Geisha'" *IPS-Inter Press Service* 7 Feb. 2006. *Academic Universe*. Lexis-Nexis. Stanford University Lib., CA. 24 Feb. 2006 <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>>.
- Brison, Susan J. *Aftermath: Violence and Remaking of a Self*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Breen, John. "Yasukuni Shrine: Ritual and Memory." *JapanFocus*. 20 Mar. 2006. <<http://japanfocus.org/article.asp?id=293>>.
- Chang, Iris. *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*. New York: BasicBooks, 1997.
- Eykholt, Mark. "The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography." *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography*. Ed. Joshua A. Fogel. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2000.
- Faxon, Alicia. "An Interpretation of Rodin's 'Adam'." *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 17 (1982): 87-91.
- Fogel, Joshua A., ed. *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000.
- "Ghosts from China and Japan." *Economist* 354 (2000): 44.
- Global News Wire. "Nanjing Pays Tribute to 'Conscience of Japan'." *China Daily* 6 Jan. 2006. Academic Universe. Lexis-Nexis. Stanford University Lib., CA. 24 Feb. 2006 <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>>.
- Hicks, George. *Japan's War Memories: Amnesia or Concealment?* Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1997.
- Honda, Katsuchi. *The Nanjing Massacre: A Japanese Journalist Confronts Japan's National Shame*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999.
- Marquand, Robert. "Nationalism Drives China, Japan Apart." *The Christian Science Monitor*, 29 December 2005. *Academic Universe*. Lexis-Nexis. Stanford University Lib., CA. 30 Mar. 2006 <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>>.
- Masaki, Tanaka. *What Really Happened in Nanking: The Refutation of a Common Myth*. Trans. Sekai Shuppan. Tokyo: Sekai Shuppan, Inc., 2000.
- McNeill, David. "An Unwelcome Visit from the Uyoku." *New Statesman* 130 (2001): 32.
- Osnos, Evan. "Hear China's 'Angry Youth'." *Chicago Tribune*. 27 February 2006. *Academic Universe*. Lexis-Nexis. Stanford University Lib., CA. 12 Mar 2006 <<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe>>.
- Pitman, Joanna. "Repentance." *New Republic* 206 (1992): 14-15.
- "Qinhua rijun Nanjing da tusha tongbao jinian guan." *Qinhua rijun Nanjing da tusha tongbao jinian guan. (The Memorial Hall of the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders)* 9 March 2006 <<http://www.nj1937.org>>.
- Qin Hua Ri jun Nanjing da tu sha tu ji*. Nanjing Shi: Jiangsu gu ji chu ban she, 1997.
- "Shigeto Nagano." *U.S. News & World Report* 116 (1994): 21.
- Sturken, Marita. "The Wall, the Screen, and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial." *Representations* 35 (1991): 118-142.
- Takenaka Corporation, "Protecting Rodin's Sculpture the "Gates of Hell" at the National Museum of Modern Art." March 31, 1999. Takenaka Corporation. 10 December 2005 [http://www.takenaka.co.jp/takenaka\\_e/news\\_e/pr9903/m9903\\_04.htm](http://www.takenaka.co.jp/takenaka_e/news_e/pr9903/m9903_04.htm)
- Tsubouchi, Yuzo and Yoshida Tsukasa. "Yasukuni Shrine as a Symbol of Japan's Modernization." *Japan Echo* 26 (1998): 48-51.
- "The Lotus." *Religion Facts*. 17 March 2006 <<http://www.religionfacts.com/buddhism/symbols/lotus.htm>>.
- Wagner, Robert Pacifici and Barry Schwartz. "The Vietnam Veterans Memorial: Commemorating a Difficult Past." *The American Journal of Sociology* 97 (1991): 376-420.
- Xu, Zhigeng. *Lest We Forget: Nanjing Massacre, 1937*. Trans. Zhang Tingquan and Lin Wusun. Beijing: Chinese Literature Press, 1995.
- Yamamoto, Masahiro. *Nanking: Anatomy of an Atrocity*. Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2000.

Yang, Daqing. "Challenges of Trans-National History: Historians and the Nanjing Atrocity." *SALS Review* 19 (1999): 133.

---. "Toward a Common Historical Understanding: The Nanking Massacre as a Challenge of Transnational History." in *Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing*. Eds. Fei Fei Li, Robert Sabella, and David Liu. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002. 236-260.

"Yasukuni Jinja: a Message to the Future." 1 Mar. 2006. *Yasukuni Jinja*. 16 Mar. 2006  
<<http://www.yasukuni.or.jp/english/>>.

Yin, James. *The Rape of Nanking: An Undeniable History in Photographs*. Chicago: Innovative Publishing Group, 1996.

Zhang, Lianhong. "The Nanjing Massacre: The Socio-Psychological Effects." *East Asia: An International Quarterly* 18 (2000): 36.