

SUMMARY

My path to research on Nanking

By 1990, when I made the decision to explore the events that took place in Nanking in the late 1930s, I had been engaged in research on German socialism for many years. When I embarked upon work in this new field, I had three objectives in mind. The first was to obtain a grasp of the points in dispute via a thorough scrutiny of the literature on the subject in spare moments (I was still doing research on East German socialism at the time). The second was to locate and interview persons who had first-hand knowledge of the subject; interviews commenced in 1995 and are still being conducted. The third was to assemble all extant records contemporaneous with the Japanese occupation of Nanking and examine them from a variety of perspectives; and, having done so, to arrive at a consistent, coherent answer to the following question: how did those who were witness to or took part in the occupation of Nanking perceive the events that transpired?

I succeeded in obtaining new perspectives from these primary sources (historical records and interviews). In 1998 I published *Nankin gyakusatsu no tettei kensho* [An exhaustive examination of the “Nanking Massacre”]. I presented a paper at the 29th International Congress of Military History in 2003, and another paper, *Nankin daigyakusatsu wa nakatta* [There was no massacre in Nanking] was serialized in a Japanese newspaper in 2005. This book unites the works listed above. Before I begin my synopsis, I would like to touch upon another controversy — one that remained unresolved for a half-century — the Katyn Forest Massacre, because it suggests a method of addressing the “Nanking Massacre.”

[1] The Katyn Forest Massacre

It is not easy to cause a great many human beings to disappear, even in wartime. An incident that necessitated such a concealment was the Katyn Forest Massacre, the slaughter of approximately 10,000 Polish military personnel, prisoners of war, in the spring of 1940. World War II commenced with the invasion of Poland by the Germans on September 1, 1939. Soon thereafter, Soviet troops invaded Poland on the basis of a secret clause in a non-aggression pact concluded between the USSR and Germany. Huge numbers of soldiers on both sides were taken prisoner.

According to J. K. Zawodny's *Death in the Forest: The Story of the Katyn Forest Massacre*, the massacre was perpetrated by the Soviet NKVD (secret police agency). Ammunition the Germans had exported to the USSR, Poland and other nations in northern Europe was brought in. The Katyn forest, which the NKVD had surrounded with barbed wire and placed under strict guard some 10 years earlier, was selected as the execution site. The sign on the barbed wire fence read: "Special zone of G.P.U. Unauthorized persons forbidden to trespass." (The GPU was a division of the NKVD.) The NKVD transported Soviet civilian prisoners to the forest to serve as the burial squad. After the slave laborers had dug trenches six to 11 feet deep, the prisoners were shot in the back of the head and then shoved into the trenches face down; the prone corpses were stacked 10-12 deep. The trenches were then covered with soil, with the intention of suppressing the evidence for all time.

However, when the Germans occupied Katyn forest in 1943, they discovered thousands of corpses there, and the massacre became known to all the world. Stalin and Hitler immediately blamed each other. The Germans allowed an international investigative team to enter Katyn forest. On the basis of circumstantial evidence, the team concluded that the crime had been committed by Soviet troops. However, maintaining friendly relations with the USSR was a priority both for Churchill and Roosevelt, and both leaders opted to sweep the matter under the carpet. But Stalin's top-secret order to execute the Polish prisoners was uncovered, and the controversy came to an end. When Soviet President Gorbachev visited Poland in 1990, he announced that the Katyn Massacre had been committed by the Soviet secret police, and offered a public apology.¹

[2] No execution order issued to Japanese military

How did the Japanese behave when they invaded Nanking? Had they made careful preparations to carry out an execution order like the one issued by Stalin, in the utmost of secrecy? Did they select a special squad of executioners who were to act as soon as Nanking fell? Did they supply the squad with weapons and ammunition? Did they select an execution site, announce that it would be off limits to civilians, station guards there, and then assign another special team to dispose of the evidence — the corpses? Was this plot exposed at the Tokyo Trials, or by postwar researchers?

Five days prior to the fall of Nanking, most of the city's inhabitants had taken refuge in a safety zone inside the walled city. The Japanese occupation began

with a sweep designed to ferret out Chinese stragglers (soldiers). That task had been assigned to the 7th Regiment, which had been issued "Precautions Relating to the Sweep of Nanking" in advance. An excerpt follows.

Assume that young and middle-aged men are stragglers or soldiers wearing civilian clothing. Apprehend and intern them. With that exception, *Chinese civilians who do not behave in a hostile manner, especially the elderly, women, and children are to be treated kindly*, so as to earn their respect for the dignity of the Imperial Army. [Italics supplied; p. 120]

Japanese troops had been ordered to assume that all young and middle-aged men were Chinese military personnel, who were to not to be killed, but apprehended and confined. There was good reason for this assumption: Chiang Kai-shek had rounded up all persons capable of waging war and sent them to the battleground. There was no order instructing Japanese military personnel to kill prisoners. Furthermore, since Japanese military authorities were looking ahead to the task of governing Nanking after occupation, they ordered their subordinates to treat women, children and the elderly with kindness.

[3] Only the Red Swastika Society buried the dead

According to the testimony of Maruyama Susumu of the Nanking Special Agency, which was run by the Japanese military, Maruyama personally entrusted the interment of all unburied corpses to a charitable organization called the Red Swastika Society. He agreed to pay the rather large sum of 30 sen (0.3 yen) per body, intending some of the money to be a form of social service.²

His testimony agrees with a report published by the Nanking International Relief Committee, chaired by Miner Searle Bates. The report reads, in part:

For example, \$2,540 was used *to complete the necessary burial enterprises* undertaken by the Red Swastika Society, which covered over 40,000 bodies otherwise uncared for. During some 40 working days, this employed nearly 170 men. On this and a number of other work relief jobs, forty cents per day of actual work was taken as the standard wage. [Italics supplied; pp. 204-5]

After the Red Swastika Society had buried 40,000 bodies, the interments were complete.

Chinese documents submitted to the Tokyo Trials stating that Chongshantang had buried 110,000 bodies supposedly supported that nation's claim that "279,586 of our compatriots were slaughtered" in Nanking. However, no records corroborated that "evidence." Chongshantang was inactive from the fall of Nanking in December 1937 to September 1938, when the organization received a subsidy. Even when active, Chongshantang was involved with providing alms to the poor and aid to orphans — not with burials.³

[4] No one argued that unburied corpses were proof of a massacre

Now we turn to the report from the Red Swastika Society, which stated that the organization had interred 40,000 bodies. It is difficult to believe that it was accurate, since the claim that burial crews could have interred 5,000 corpses each day (including days on which it rained or snowed) is unrealistic. A more likely number would be a total of 14,000-15,000 bodies in all, which means that the Red Swastika Society inflated the figures by a factor of 3. But the Nanking Special Agency simply looked the other way, believing that the extra money would benefit the community in some way.

The residents of Nanking were well aware of the burials. Neither John Rabe (chairman of the International Committee) nor Rev. Bates (a key member) ever claimed that the burials were proof that a massacre like the one in Katyn forest had been perpetrated. Nor, for that matter, were protests against a massacre lodged by the U.S., British or German embassy in Nanking. Even Bates did not condemn the Japanese for having left corpses lying around after a massacre. The bodies buried by the Red Swastika Society were casualties of war; the burials were necessary, hygienic measures to prevent the outbreak and spread of contagious diseases. Needless to say, neither Chinese Nationalist Party head Chiang Kai-shek, nor Communist Party leader Mao Zedong directed any criticism having to do with corpses at the Japanese.

[5] No accounts of witnessed unlawful killings in "Daily Reports of Serious Injuries to Civilians"

The International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone oversaw the administration of the safety zone, which had been established to accommodate civilians. Any discussion of injuries to civilians in Nanking must involve documents entitled "Daily Report of Serious Injuries to Civilians" submitted by the International Committee to the Japanese Embassy in Nanking.

All these reports, which must be considered official records, appear in *Documents of the Nanking Safety Zone*. Document No. 1 in the collection, dated December 14, was a letter of gratitude from the International Committee addressed to the Japanese commander-in-chief, which commenced: “Honorable Sir: We come to thank you for the fine way your artillery spared the Safety Zone” (See p. 125.)

If Japanese soldiers had murdered thousands of civilians the moment Nanking’s wall gates were breached on December 13, as some argue, would the International Committee have posted such a letter to Japanese military authorities? Furthermore, even in documents dated December 15, there is no mention of mass murder. One of them, which pales in comparison, reads: “On December 15, the American Ambassador’s residence was broken into and searched and some small personal articles taken.” There are no witnesses mentioned in the case record. Why didn’t International Committee Chairman Rabe and his colleague Bates issue such a protest against mass murders allegedly perpetrated by Japanese troops? Nevertheless, no protest to that effect — not even a report — emanated from the International Committee.

Of course, no report of a massacre was issued. No account of a witnessed, unlawful killing ever appeared in any of the aforementioned daily reports. A detailed examination of the reports reveals that on December 13, one rape and two lootings (no murders or arsons) were reported. On December 14, one murder, four rapes, three lootings and no arsons. On December 15, four murders, five rapes, five lootings (still no arsons) were reported. During the two months following the fall of Nanking, the daily reports contained a total of 25 alleged murder cases involving 52 victims. With the exception of one witnessed “lawful execution,” murder case reports listed no names of witnesses or even of the person reporting the case.⁴

The possibility remains that some information might have been missing from the daily reports. Tomisawa Shigenobu entered information from every available contemporary Japanese, Chinese, English and German document into a computer. In his book, *Nankin jiken no kakushin* [At the core of the Nanking Incident], Tomisawa states the results of his research: a total of 94 murder cases reported during the two months following the defeat of Nanking. Only one of those cases, a lawful execution, bore the name of a witness. (A front-page article, “Nanking Massacre Story,” in the December 15 edition of the *Chicago Daily News*, made mention of “frequent murders” committed during the first three

days of the Japanese occupation. However, there is no information in any official record that corroborates the article.)

In 1994, 500,000 people were massacred in Rwanda. When 207 children in a Nyamata orphanage were interviewed, 96% thought that they would be killed, 85% sensed the smell of rotting bodies, 80% heard the screams of dying people and 56% witnessed family members being killed.⁵ In contrast, no one in the Nanking's crowded Safety Zone witnessed any unlawful killing. Rev. Magee testified at the Tokyo Trials that he had witnessed one act of murder. But the fact that he wrote that the "actual killing we did not see as it took place" in his diary negates his testimony on the witness stand. Is it still possible to claim that the Japanese perpetrated a massacre in Nanking? After all, didn't Timperley conclude from the daily reports of serious injuries to civilians that "The following section of cases ... completes the story of the first two months of the Japanese Army's occupation of Nanking?" (See p. 267) Or was what he wrote in Shanghai, on the basis of reports from Nanking, mistaken?

[6] No one claimed that Nanking's population had decreased due to a massacre

There are two theories about the population of Nanking. One proposes that it was 500,000 before the Japanese invasion, and dwindled to 300,000 after the city fell. For instance, a missive sent to the Public Relations Department of the Nationalist government's National Military Council on November 23, 20 days before the fall of Nanking, stated that, according to a survey, the current population of Nanking was approximately 500,000. But was such a population survey really necessary at a time when the majority of Nanking's residents were fleeing the city, and when emergency preparations for war were being made? Was it even possible? Most likely, this document was created at a later date. There is no mention of a population survey in the diaries or letters of European and American residents of Nanking. Moreover, at a press conference held on November 30, 1937 and attended by the mayor of Nanking, foreign residents reported that the population of Nanking was "about 200,000."⁶

The International Committee's understanding of Nanking's population during the period extending from two weeks to several hours prior to the city's fall was 200,000. Its understanding of the population eight days after the fall of Nanking was, again, 200,000. The Japanese began issuing civilian passports on Christmas Eve; their tally of the number of residents formed the basis for a population estimate of 250,000 released by the International Committee one

month subsequent to the fall of the city. One reason for the population increase was the fact that the Japanese counted Chinese soldiers who had come out of hiding as civilians.

Since there were no witnesses to unlawful killings, there was no perception of any decrease in the population. But as I shall explain later, Rev. Bates wrote (under a pseudonym) in 1938 that the Japanese killed 12,000 civilians. The vast majority of Nanking's civilians were crammed into the Safety Zone, an area measuring 3.86 square kilometers. If 12,000 persons had been killed in the Safety Zone, there would surely have been a multitude of witnesses. However, only Rev. Bates made the accusation, and under an assumed name at that. Rev. Bates couldn't have believed that the population of Nanking was 238,000. The International Committee (of which Rev. Bates was a leading member) officially announced that the population of Nanking was 200,000 immediately before its fall, 200,000 eight days after its fall, and 250,000 one month after its fall. Furthermore, in the 1939 *Report of the Nanking International Relief Committee*, Rev. Bates again stated that the population was 250,000. Nowhere in his public pronouncements do we see any evidence that Rev. Bates believed the population had decreased.

[7] Unlawful combatants analogous to Al Qaeda

A serious situation, one addressed neither by the Europeans and Americans in Nanking in 1937 nor by contemporary scholars, arose immediately before the city fell. Chinese soldiers never expressed the desire to surrender. Instead, just like Al Qaeda and Taliban members, they shed their uniforms and disappeared among the civilians in the unarmed, neutral Safety Zone.

In terms of international law, the regulations appended to the Hague Convention cannot be applied to Chinese troops fighting in Nanking, unlawful combatants who lacked the qualifications to enjoy the rights set forth in those regulations. Captured Chinese soldiers who resisted were executed, and those executions were no secret in Nanking. But no member of the International Committee claimed that they were executions of prisoners of war. Nor did any representative of the U.S., British or German embassies in Nanking. No arguments to that effect were made at the Tokyo Trials. During the 11-year period between December 1937 (the fall of Nanking) and December 1948 (the end of the Tokyo Trials), no one publicly accused the Japanese of having conducted unlawful executions of prisoners of war in Nanking. In legal terms, the execution of Chinese troops — unlawful combatants to whom the

regulations appended to the Hague Convention did not apply —were simply that: the execution of unlawful combatants, not of prisoners of war.

Nevertheless, the Japanese treated them as prisoners of war, using them as paid laborers. The number of such laborers had risen to 10,000 two months after the fall of Nanking.

[8] No acknowledgement of a massacre from Nationalists or Communists

If some Japanese soldiers did commit crimes, they were of the sort that commonly occurs in war zones: lootings and rapes. The British consul in Nanking sent a report home dated January 28, 1938 stating, “Majority of cases are of ransacking.” (See p. 143) Even when all contemporary records (in Japanese, Chinese, English and German) were input into a computer and compared, the unlawful acts of which Japanese soldiers were accused total 201 lootings, 243 rapes and 34 arsons. Among them, 26 cases of looting, 17 rapes and one arson seemed to be witnessed.

Therefore, even the inaugural issue (April 1938) of *China at War*, an English-language propaganda magazine compiled from official bulletins and published by the Nationalist Ministry of Information, made no mention of a massacre in Nanking. At 300 press conferences held over an 11-month period beginning just prior to the fall of Nanking, the Ministry of Information never breathed a word about a massacre. Appeals to the Japanese people and friendly nations were prepared by the Nationalist Ministry of Information to commemorate the first anniversary of the Sino-Japanese War, and delivered by Chiang Kai-shek. Neither of them referred to a “Nanking Massacre.” In a lecture presented by Mao Zedong in Yenan entitled “On Protracted War,” Mao never stated that the Japanese had massacred Chinese troops in Nanking. On the contrary, he criticized the Japanese for poor strategy because they had not killed every last Chinese soldier in Nanking.

[9] No mention of “Nanking Massacre” in English-language magazines published in Shanghai

Since neither the Chinese Nationalist nor Communist party had censured the Japanese for having perpetrated a massacre in Nanking, there was no criticism emanating from the U.S. or the nations of Europe. It is true that the U.S. government castigated the Japanese for having sunk the *USS Panay* and for an assault on Consul Allison; the only protest from the British government was

against the shelling of the *Ladybird*.

On July 7, 1938, most of the English-language magazines edited and published by Europeans and Americans in Shanghai printed special issues commemorating the anniversary of the Sino-Japanese War. Although seven months had elapsed since the defeat of Nanking and all information about the circumstances surrounding the city's fall had been gathered, none of the commemorative magazines contained any mention of a massacre in Nanking. Needless to say, there were no special "massacre" issues.

[10] Only Rev. Bates publicly declared that tens of thousands had been massacred

The accusation that the Japanese had massacred 40,000 Chinese in Nanking was first made in July 1938 when *What War Means*, edited by Harold Timperley and commemorating the first anniversary of the Sino-Japanese War, was published. Timperley was the China correspondent for the British newspaper *Manchester Guardian*. He made a point of explaining that the accounts appearing in the book, contributed by American residents of Nanking, were intended to impress upon readers the horrors of war. However, the truth was that Timperley was a paid advisor to the Nationalist Ministry of Information, which had commissioned him to compile *What War Means*. The book contained a statement submitted by Rev. Bates, though not signed with his real name, to the effect that the Japanese had killed approximately 40,000 Chinese: 12,000 civilians and 30,000 captured soldiers. Even though he had used a pseudonym, Rev. Bates (also an advisor to the Chinese Government) was the only one of the approximately 20 foreign residents of Nanking to openly voice the massacre accusation and state the number of victims. Moreover, the Nationalist Ministry of Information published the first accusation in one of its own propaganda books.

[11] Both Rev. Bates and the Ministry of Information retracted "40,000 massacred" argument

Rev. Bates was a famous missionary in Nanking, as well as a leading member of the International Committee. According to his testimony at the Tokyo Trials, it was he who personally delivered the "Daily Reports of Serious Injuries to Civilians" to the Japanese Embassy. Rev. Bates did not enter information about even one witnessed unlawful killing in these official records of the International Committee. Even when he met with an officer attached to the American

Embassy in Tokyo, who visited Nanking on a fact-finding mission four months after the city's fall, Rev. Bates said nothing about a massacre. But in the Ministry of Information's propaganda book, he had written about a massacre that claimed 40,000 victims, albeit under an assumed name. Where did the truth lie?

Bates posited the argument that the Japanese had slaughtered 40,000 Chinese in a memorandum written one month after the fall of Nanking. The memorandum appeared in five publications: the English and Chinese editions (published simultaneously) of *What War Means, Documents of the Safety Zone*, "prepared from official sources" and three English-language propaganda magazines (See p. 234) published by the Council of International Affairs whose director was Wang Pengsheng.

Noteworthy here is the fact that the Council of International Affairs was a "special organization" attached to the National Military Council.⁷ When the Council published Rev. Bates' memorandum (all five times), it expunged the section that contains the claim that 40,000 Chinese were massacred. Perhaps Rev. Bates approved of the deletion after the fact. (It is also possible that he asked the publishers to delete it.) As Kasahara Tokushi writes, Rev. Bates' argument was not omitted from the aforementioned publications due to lack of space. There was plenty of room for it. It was expunged because it was war propaganda that could not be substantiated by official records.

[12] Ministry of Information's top-secret documents make no reference to a massacre

Three months prior to the defeat of Nanking, the Second Nationalist-Communist United Front was formed; the Nationalist Ministry of Information was established two months later. The Nationalist and Communist employees of the Ministry of Information were put in charge of international propaganda at the ministry's International Information Department.

Confidential reports describing the international propaganda they created appear in the top-secret *Outline of the Operations of the International Information Department, Ministry of Information*. But none of the reports, whether submitted by the Foreign Operations, Editorial Operations, Counterintelligence Operations or any other of the department's sections contains even the remotest hint of propaganda in which the word "massacre" or anything that could be construed to mean the same appeared. Of paramount interest is a statement in

the Counterintelligence Operation Section's report to the effect that *Gajjin mokuto no nichigun boko* [Japanese atrocities witnessed by foreigners] was a propaganda book edited and printed by that same section of the Ministry of Information.

This book was written by Harold Timperley (田伯烈), a prominent British journalist. The contents were on rape, arson, plunder, namely wicked conduct after the enemy entered into Nanking on December 13, 1937. The book also equally described the detailed situation of deterioration of military discipline and degradation of human nature. (See pp. 257f, 258)

The Ministry of Information believed that the Japanese had committed rapes, arsons and looting after their victory in the Battle of Nanking, but not that they had perpetrated a massacre. Therefore, the "Nanking Massacre" as described in *What War Means* was war propaganda produced with the aid of "foreign friends." The Ministry of Information did not reveal that it was responsible for that propaganda. But since the ministry did not believe that there had been a massacre, and since the claim had been made that the information had been taken from official sources, the Nationalists removed text relating to the massacre accusation from four English-language magazines. Moreover, they removed that portion from the Chinese translation of *What War Means* to avoid the book's being labeled war propaganda, because such a huge distortion of the facts would soon have been exposed in China. Had the Nationalists been convinced that there had been a massacre in Nanking, there would have been no need to make the deletion.

[13] Absence of records, speeches or proclamations substantiating the "Nanking Massacre"

Seven years ago, after establishing the majority of points in dispute, I wrote the following (in *An Exhaustive Examination of the "Nanking Massacre"*).

There is not one single source that proves the claim that Chinese citizens were massacred in Nanking, or that states the number of victims. As long as that continues to be the case, the Nanking Massacre will remain a global fantasy - nothing more.

We invite those who would say otherwise to demonstrate irrefutable proof that the Japanese violated international law

subsequent to the fall of Nanking. (See p. 237f.)

My opinion has not changed since then. I am not saying, “It was not recorded because it did not happen.”⁸ What I am saying is that those who accuse the Japanese of violations of international law in time of war (i.e., the “Nanking Massacre”) must produce supporting evidence (statements of eyewitnesses, contemporaneous records, speeches or proclamations). Until they do, the “Nanking Massacre” shall remain as it has ever been: not a topic of historical research, but a myth rooted in ideology.

1. J. K. Zawodny, *Death in the Forest: The Story of the Katyn Forest Massacre* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), pp. 16, 23, etc.; Saito Tsutomu, “Sutarin hiroku, daisanbu: Bogyaku no koya15” [Stalin’s secret records, Part 3: Wilderness of tyranny 15] in *Sankei Shinbun* (18 December 2000).

2. Higashinakano Shudo, ed., “Nankin tokumu kikan (Mantetsu shain) Maruyama Susumu shi no kaiso” [Recollections of Maruyama Susumu, Nankin Special Agency member (former Manchurian Railway employee)] in Higashinakano Shudo, ed., *Nankin gyakusatsu kenkyu no saizensen 2002* [At the frontline of research on the “Nanking Massacre” 2002] (Tokyo: Tendensha, 2002), vol. 1, p. 222.

3. For information about the Red Swastika Society and Chongshantang, see Ichiki Yoshimichi, ed., *Nankin* [Nanking] (Nanking Japanese Chamber of Commerce, 1941), pp. 233, 236; Nankin tokumu kikan chousei [Nanking Special Agency, ed.], *Nankin shisei gaikyo* [Overview of the Nanking municipal government] (Nanking: Nanking Special Agency, 1942), pp. 196, 198; “Outline of the Nanking Municipal Government: Compilation of Secret Documents from Nanking Municipal Government Agencies”, *Sources from Modern Chinese History*, Vol. 3, No. 57 (Taipei: Wenhai Chubanshe, publication date unknown), pp. 34, 182-3.

4. Tomisawa Shigenobu, *Nankin jiken no kakushin* [At the core of the Nanking Incident] (Tokyo: Tendensha, 2003), pp. i-xvii. Furthermore, if *shot* means *shot to death*, the total number of murder cases rises to 26.

5. UNICEF-commissioned Report on Children’s Exposure to War Scenes in Rwanda, Information Note, INF/GVA/94/6 (04 November 1994), p. 2.

6. Minnie Vautrin’s letter: A Review of the First Month -- December 13, 1937 to January 13, 1938, p. 89 in Archives of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, Record Group No. 11, Box 145, Yale Divinity School Library, New Haven, Connecticut.

7. Chen Yunlong, ed., “Wang Pengsheng Commemorative Anthology”, *Sources from Modern Chinese History*, Vol. 98 (Taipei: Wenhai Chubanshe, n.d.), p. 91.

8. Joshua A. Vogel, ed., *The Nanking Massacre in History and Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 147.