

## Reconciling Narratives of the Nanjing Massacre in Japanese and Chinese Textbooks

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### I. One Chinese Student's Findings

Recently, in a course I taught, there was a student from China who conducted a research project regarding the different ways that the Nanjing Massacre has been remembered in China and Japan. Although the quotation from her paper that I would like to read is long, I would like to share it here as it underscores a significant rift in remembrances in our two countries:

I was born in 1983 and received an ordinary education. Many Chinese tend to associate the Nanjing Massacre with an image of mass execution, rape, and looting. To the Chinese, the Nanjing Massacre is not a scholarly issue, but an issue relating to ethnic identity and emotion. Chinese who receive an ordinary education learn that the Nanjing Massacre involved the slaughter of 300,000 people. The Chinese public remembers it as an indisputable fact, just like the earth is round.

When I came to Japan and discovered different views of the Nanjing Massacre, I was stunned, to put it frankly. The image of Nanjing that I had in mind since elementary school was challenged and I was confused. Whereas in China, the next generation studies a fixed account of Nanjing, the dispute over Nanjing continues in Japan. Because many scholars write contradictory studies of the massacre, it seems apparent that young Japanese often get confused. Moreover, their interest in Nanjing is very low; all they know are terms such as "Nanjing Massacre" and "Nanjing Incident" without comprehending the details of the event.

Since I came to Japan, I gradually came to realize that the general atmosphere surrounding scholarship on the Nanjing Massacre is quite different in Japan and China. Chinese have had a fixed perception of what happened in the Nanjing Massacre, and they do not allow Japanese to challenge it. In contrast, Japanese think that Japan would be innocent if there had been no atrocities in Nanjing.

If the Japanese were to tell the Chinese that the Nanjing Massacre is an "illusion," "fabrication," or "Chinese propaganda," that would certainly infuriate them. In the Chinese public memory, the Nanjing Massacre and the killing of 300,000 people are indisputable truths. No denial or indecision is allowed in China when it comes to the Nanjing Massacre. Chinese students not only read in their textbooks about the atrocities committed against 300,000 people, but they also learn it as common knowledge. Thus, the question of whether the number of deaths was actually 300,000 or not attracts no attention among Chinese. In China, all of the citizens share a public memory that 300,000 people were slaughtered. In Japan, there are people who claim that "the Nanjing massacre was a lie," but those Japanese who do not acknowledge the Nanjing Massacre will be the object of opprobrium in China.

The differences in the ways the Chinese and Japanese publics have remembered Nanjing are major obstacle to reconciliation today, and historical education is one of the reasons for the rift. A simple look at the history textbooks used by both Japanese and Chinese students makes clear how different those public memories actually are.

## II. Description of the Nanjing Massacre in Japanese and Chinese Textbooks

### (1) Japan

In Japan, there are eight history textbooks that are used today in junior high schools. All textbooks use the words “Nanjing Incident,” “Nanjing Massacre,” or “Nanjing Massacre Incident” to describe the atrocities. The textbook published by the Tōkyō Shoseki is the most widely adopted in Japan and currently holds a market share of 51.2%. In it, the passage about the Nanjing Massacre reads as follows. “The Japanese military occupied the capital of Nanjing in the same year [1937]. In its process, [the military] killed a massive number of Chinese, including women and children.” In contrast, the publisher Nihon Shoseki, specified the estimate of the casualties in Nanjing, stating, “In late December [1937], the Japanese military captured the capital Nanjing. [The military] killed as many as 200,000 prisoners of war and civilians, and the atrocities and looting were not brought to an end; therefore, [Japan’s capture of Nanjing] received fierce international condemnation.” Although Nihon Shoseki resisted pressure from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) to omit a specific figure for the death estimate, Nihon Shoseki was the only publisher among the eight that gave a specific number to quantify the atrocities in Nanjing. As conservative critics began to rally against the textbook, the market share of this book fell to a mere 3.1%.

Unlike these two textbooks, Fusōsha’s textbook, written by the pro-Imperial revisionist organization called the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, avoided strong terms such as “atrocities” and stressed that the debate over Nanjing is on-going and that the historical facts are unclear. They write, “the Japanese military believed that Chiang Kai-shek would surrender if Nanjing were captured, and they conquered Nanjing in December.” In the footnote, the publisher added, “at this time, the Japanese military killed and wounded many Chinese soldiers and civilians (the Nanjing Incident). Moreover, various views and data exist regarding the historical facts, including the casualty estimate, and the debate continues to this day.” Because citizens’ groups organized a successful campaign to prevent the textbook from being adopted by boards of education across Japan, its market share has ended up only around 0.4%.

### (2) China

In 2001, the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China issued the Standard History Curriculum for Mandatory Education in Full-Time Schools. Based on the standards laid forth in this document, the Beijing Teachers’ College Press published a textbook called *New Century: Standard History Textbook in Mandatory Education*. This book described the Nanjing Massacre as follows.

*The Nanjing Massacre:* In December 1937, the Japanese military captured Nanjing. The Japanese military committed bloody atrocities against the residents of Nanjing and prisoners of war, killing them in extremely cruel methods including mass execution, burning, burying alive, beheading, and biting by dogs. The Nanjing Massacre was the most horrible [event] in world [history]. On December 16, the Japanese military escorted approximately 5,000 Chinese civilians and captured officers and soldiers from the Guest House for Overseas Chinese to the Zhongshan Pier. After turning machine guns against [these captives], [the Japanese military] threw the dead bodies into the Yangtze River and burned them. On the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Japanese military tied 57,000 people, regardless of age and gender, confined at Mufu Mountain, took them to the Caoxie Gorge at

Xiaguan, and killed them with machine guns. Moreover, [the Japanese military] bayoneted a crowd struggling to survive in the sea of blood to death. Then, the Japanese military scattered kerosene, burned the dead bodies, and dumped bodies and bones in the Yangtze River.

In addition, the Japanese Army competed with one another in an abnormal “killing contest.” Two Japanese lieutenants, Mukai Toshiaki and Noda Tsuyoshi, decided to see who could be the first to cut down one hundred Chinese by the time of the fall of Nanjing. By the time that these two murderers conducted an interview [with a Japanese newspaper correspondent] at the foot of Zijin Mountain with their blood-thirsty swords in hand, Noda had killed 105 people, while Mukai had killed 106. [No one knew] which one cut down one hundred people first, so the contest continued. They decided to judge the winner by cutting down one hundred and fifty. In December 1937, Japan’s *Tōkyō Nichinichi Newspaper* described the killing contest from the victor’s viewpoint. The Japanese military considered this [killing contest] as something that would “enhance national glory” and called it an “honorable accomplishment.”

According to statistics, the estimate of the deaths caused by Japanese atrocities against unarmed Nanjing residents and Chinese soldiers amounted to more than 300,000 just during the six weeks of the occupation by the Japanese military. The Nanjing Massacre is one of the greatest acts of violence perpetrated by the Japanese aggressors on the Chinese people.

The different descriptions of the Nanjing Massacre are reflected in different understandings of the atrocities. According to a survey of 221 Japanese college students and 524 Chinese college students conducted by the Chinese student mentioned above, all Chinese students answered “yes” and 79.2% of the Japanese students answered yes to the question “[Do you think that] the Nanjing Massacre occurred?” 6.8% of the Japanese students answered no, and 14.03% stated “don’t know.” In response to a question asking the students if the hundred-man killing contest took place, 92.18% of the Chinese students said yes, while 26.24% of the Japanese answered no. Among the Japanese students, 58.82% responded that they had no idea. As to the estimate of the victims in Nanjing, 86.07% of the Chinese students and 16.29% of the Japanese students answered “300,000,” whereas 1.72% of the Chinese and 13.12% of the Japanese chose “200,000.” Those who answered “don’t know” accounted for 2.67% of the Chinese students and 16.24% of the Japanese students.

As the survey found, many Japanese believe that the Nanjing Massacre occurred. This is surely understandable because almost all elementary school Japanese history textbooks, all high school Japanese history textbooks, and almost all high school world history textbooks include mention, however fleeting, of the “Nanjing Incident,” “Nanjing Massacre,” and “Nanjing Atrocities.” The problem is that teachers in Japan now face difficulties in teaching the details of the Nanjing Massacre in schools because of social pressure by MEXT and local boards of education. Moreover, although students may remember that the atrocities took place, descriptions of Nanjing in school textbooks are too brief to understand the details of what happened there.

### **III. Political Forces in Japan Attempting to Obliterate the Memory of the Nanjing Massacre**

The historical academy in Japan recognizes the wholesale atrocities in Nanjing as a historical fact. Almost all history and other dictionaries have entries about the atrocities under

“Nanjing Incident,” “Nanjing Atrocities,” or “Nanjing Massacre.” For example, *Kôjien*, the most authoritative dictionary of Japanese terms published by Iwanami Shoten, explains under the entry “Nanjing Massacre” that “the Japanese military slaughtered massive number of surrendered soldiers, prisoners of war, and ordinary citizens inside and around the Nanjing castle; moreover, they committed crimes such as arson, looting, and rape, when Nanjing was captured in 1937 in the Sino-Japanese War.”

On August 2, 1997, the Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional for the Ministry of Education to reject the descriptions of the Nanjing Massacre and concurrent sexual violence in the history textbook written by the historian Saburô Ienaga. The Japanese judicial system, too, has recognized that the atrocities in Nanjing are a historical fact and, in fact, this is the reason most history textbooks in Japanese elementary, junior high, and high schools began to include the Nanjing Massacre in the first place. The official view of the government, as presented at the homepage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is that “[t]he government of Japan believes that it cannot be denied that following the entrance of the Japanese Army into Nanjing in 1937, the killing of a large number of noncombatants, looting, and other acts occurred” ([http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/q\\_a/faq16.html#q8](http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/q_a/faq16.html#q8)).

Nevertheless, the main reasons many Japanese do not know the details of the massacre are that (1) teachers do not teach it in detail, (2) the mass media avoids extensive coverage of the atrocities, and (3) pro-imperial revisionists have waged successful campaigns alleging that the Nanjing Massacre was an illusion or fabrication. In addition, revisionists and right-wing extremists who have made threats and engaged in harassment in response to speeches, publications, news reports, and exhibitions on the Nanjing Massacre have gone largely unchallenged. In September 2004, for example, right-wing activists with their truck mounting loud speakers came to the publisher Shôeisha and demanded they delete or revise the illustrations depicting the Nanjing atrocities in a comic series titled *The Country is Burning* by the popular comic artist Hiroshi Motomiya. The publisher and the artist apologized and promised revisions. In March 2005, the Saitama-Prefecture Peace Museum deleted the term “Nanjing Massacre” and the photograph of atrocities at Xiaguan taken by Moriyasu Murase in its displayed chronology. After revisions were made, the visitors only learn that “on December 13, 1937, the Japanese military captured Nanjing.” It is widely believed that Kiyoshi Ueda, the governor of the prefecture who supports the revisionist movement, ordered the museum to do so. In June 2006, Ueda stated at the prefectural assembly that “there were no military comfort women.” He also appointed Shirô Takahashi, professor at Meisei University and vice chairman of the Japanese Society for Textbook Reform (a revisionist organization established in 1997), to be members of the board of education in Saitama.

Three times in postwar Japan, the government has waged critical challenges to history textbooks in attempts to tone down or delete descriptions of Japan’s wartime aggression, especially atrocities such as the Nanjing Massacre. The first challenge occurred in 1955, and the second took place in the early 1980s. The third began in 1997 and continues unresolved to this day. This third on-going challenge derives its force from the revisionists, “grassroots conservatives,” and right-wing extremists, and it has been most vigorous and aggressive. These revisionists have already succeeded in deleting the words “comfort women for the Japanese military” (*Nihongun ianfu*) from junior high school history textbooks. Their next target seems to be the deletion of the Nanjing Massacre in junior high school textbooks, as the massacre is the only component of Japan’s wartime atrocities that remains untouched in junior high school textbooks.

January 1997 saw the formation of the Japanese Society for Textbook Reform, a revisionist organization that has played a central role in the third textbook challenge. The chairman was Kanji Nishio, while Shirō Takahashi served as vice chairman. The primary goal of the group was to romanticize and justify Japan's wars and colonialism as well as to conceal Japan's history of aggression and atrocities. For this purpose, the society pursued the project to publish their junior high school history textbook titled *New History Textbook*, which the government approved in 2001 after the authors revised more than 130 items. While publishing their own version, the society also condemned existing history textbooks as "masochistic," "biased," and "traitorous."

In February 1997, Shōichi Nakagawa, who is currently the chairman of the Policy Research Council of the Liberal Democratic Party, Nariaki Nakayama, who is currently the Minister of MEXT, and Shinzō Abe, who is currently the Prime Minister, founded the Society of Junior LDP Diet Members Concerned about Japan's Future and Historical Education. 107 LDP Diet members joined this organization. Most members had participated in the LDP Committee to Examine History, established in August 1993 by Sadatoshi Yamanaka (Chairman), Seisuke Okuno (former Justice Minister), Ryūtarō Hashimoto (former Prime Minister), Masayuki Fujio (former Minister of Education), and Tadashi Itagaki (general of the Imperial Army). The Committee published *An Outline of the Greater East Asian War* (Tokyo: Tendensha, 1995), in which the Committee recognized the "Greater East Asian War" as a "war that liberated Asia." In addition, they condemned the judgment of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, including the ruling regarding the Nanjing Massacre. Tadashi Itagaki, a former general of the Imperial Army, was largely in charge of organizing the committee, and his views were reflected in its interpretation of the war.

The Society of Junior LDP Diet Members was provoked by the inclusion of "Japanese military comfort women" in all 1997 edition junior high school textbooks. These LDP members worked together with the Japanese Society for Textbook Reform. As a result, the term "comfort women for the Japanese military" disappeared from all junior high school textbooks. It is believed that Shōichi Nakagawa and Shinzō Abe pressured the executives of the NHK Broadcasting company to revise the coverage of the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery in an NHK educational program titled "Wartime Sexual Violence in Question" (*Towareru senji sei bōryoku*).

In May 1997, an organization intent on revising the constitution called the National People's Council to Defend Japan and a pro-imperial, revisionist, religious organization called the Council to Defend Japan merged and founded the Japan Conference, the largest pro-imperial revisionist organization in Japan. Their goal was to work toward the promulgation of a new constitution. In the same month, their chairman Takeo Hiranuma (the former Minister of Trade and Industry), the acting chairman Shōichi Nakagawa (Minister of Agriculture), Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, and National Security Advisor Yuriko Koike, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirobumi Shimomura, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Tarō Asō inaugurated the Diet Members' Committee of Japan Conference, a non-partisan organization that fully supports the Japan Conference. As of July 2006, 235 Diet members (twenty-five from the Democratic Party) have participated in this committee. More than 50% of the LDP Diet members, 60% of the current ministers in the Abe administration, and four out of five National Security Advisors are members.

Another non-partisan organization named the Diet Members' Forum of the Shinto Political League has been a close ally with the Diet Member's Committee of Japan Conference. This forum is a branch political organization of the Shinto Political League which has attempted

to revise the constitution and to transform Japan into a “divine nation.” This forum was established in 1970, and the members include the current chairman Tamisuke Watanuki, the vice-chairman Takeo Hiranuma, former Minister of Foreign Affairs Nobutaka Machimura, Minister of MEXT Fumiaki Ibuki, National Security Advisor Eriko Yamatani, Prime Minister Shinzô Abe, and former Prime Minister Yoshirô Mori. As of today, 223 Diet members are affiliated with this forum.

Both the Japan Conference and the Shinto Political League have formed networks with business circles and the mass media. They use television, newspapers, and popular magazines to disperse their views, and in this way, they deny the Nanjing Massacre. As a result, there are more books and television programs that present the revisionist view of the Nanjing Massacre than books and shows that acknowledge the full extent of the atrocities in Nanjing.

The year 1997 was a turning point not only in the on-going third challenge to the history textbooks, but also in the whole of Japanese politics. Overall, the political scene has become much more conservative as powerful political forces emerge – forces that denounce descriptions of the Nanjing Massacre and mentions of comfort women for the Japanese military in history textbooks.

In 2001, the non-partisan revisionist organization, the Society to Consider Issues Regarding History Textbooks, led by Shôichi Nakagawa, succeeded the Society of Junior LDP Diet Members Concerned about Japan’s Future and Historical Education. The society demanded that high-ranking personnel in MEXT should include different interpretations of the Nanjing Massacre – theories such as “the theory of illusion” and “the theory of zero or near-zero casualty estimate.” Responding to this demand, the people who were examining high school history textbooks in 2006 urged authors to state that some academics deny existing accounts of the Nanjing Massacre. Kiyoshi Ueda, the governor of Saitama mentioned above, was in 2001 a member of this society as a Democratic Party politician.

In 2007, the Society of LDP Diet Members Concerned with Japan’s Future and History Education (not to be confused with the Society of Junior Diet Members Concerned with Japan’s Future and History Education), led by Nariaki Nakayama (chairman of the society who now serves as the Minister of Education), established two subcommittees dealing with the Nanjing Massacre and “comfort women.” The purpose was to confront the international spread of the memory of the Nanjing Massacre and Japan’s system of sexual slavery for the military. Likewise, revisionist members of the Democratic Party founded a league to examine the comfort women issue and the Nanjing Massacre in order to combat the historical view propagated by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East and anti-Japanese propaganda films on historical issues such as the massacre.

#### **IV. *History that Opens the Future* and Historical Reconciliation**

The attempts of the Japanese government to whitewash the historical memory of its wartime aggression and colonial activities have provoked Japan’s neighbors and raised international ire over the history textbooks in Japan. Unlike the German government, the Japanese government is reluctant, if not refusing outright to face its responsibility for the war. It has rarely made any effort to communicate with its neighbors to write a history textbook that shares a common historical viewpoint.

Although the Japanese government has not come to terms with its past, ordinary Japanese have taken initiatives to write history textbooks that might be shared with neighboring nations. One attempt resulted in the publication of *History That Opens the Future: The Modern History*

*of Three East Asian Nations* (Kôbunken, 2005; the English edition will be published by University of Hawaii Press). Historians, educators, as well as ordinary citizens from Japan, China, and South Korea met eleven times between 2002 and 2005, and in May 2005, the book was published in the three nations. 80,000 copies have been sold in Japan, 130,000 copies in China, and 65,000 copies in South Korea. The book is the first piece of educational historiography in East Asia edited by authors in all three nations. I participated in this project, and our goal was to create a history textbook that might be used by all three nations in the near future. We are currently revising the book in the hopes of accomplishing this goal.

*History That Opens the Future*, for example, contains two pages describing the Nanjing Massacre in order to try to build common ground between Japanese and Chinese students. As for the casualty estimate, the book introduces two estimates: 200,000, the number produced in the Tokyo Trial, and 300,000, a number from the Nanjing Military Tribunal initiated by the Nationalist Party. Because the book did not state that 300,000 Chinese were “slaughtered,” some Chinese readers sent critical letters to the editors in China. Responding to this criticism, the Chinese editors stressed that the 300,000 figure is rather symbolic and that a leading Japanese scholar in the study of the Nanjing Massacre also participated in this project.

The description of the Nanjing Massacre in the volume is aimed at filling a substantial rift in understandings between Chinese and Japanese students and at promoting fruitful discussions of the events among students, regardless of their nationality. There is a possibility that this book will be used as a textbook in South Korea and China. If one day the Japanese were to choose leaders that did not refuse to face Japan’s historical aggression and colonial activities but instead supported the use of a forward-thinking textbook, I firmly believe East Asia will go a long way toward historical reconciliation.