

Article

The Nanking Atrocity: Still and Moving Images 1937–1944

Gary Evans

Department of Communication, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5, Canada; E-Mail: evansg@uottawa.ca;
Tel.: +1-6135635238; Fax: +1-6135635240

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Abstract

This manuscript investigates the facts of publication of the images of the Nanking Atrocity (December 1937–January 1938) in *LIFE* and *LOOK* magazines, two widely read United States publications, as well as the Nanking atrocity film clips that circulated to millions more in American and Canadian newsreels some years later. The publishers of these images were continuing the art of manipulation of public opinion through multimodal visual media, aiming them especially at the less educated mass public. The text attempts to describe these brutal images in their historical context. Viewing and understanding the underlying racial context and emotive impact of these images may be useful adjuncts to future students of World War II. If it is difficult to assert how much these severe images changed public opinion, one can appreciate how the emerging visual culture was transforming the way that modern societies communicate with and direct their citizens' thoughts.

Keywords

Nanking Atrocity; impact of still and moving images

Issue

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1. Introduction

In 2008, the seventieth anniversary of the Nanking Atrocity passed with limited international interest in the event that marked Japan's depredations in the Chinese capital city of Nanking (Nanjing) from December 1937 through January 1938. The event, including the wholesale murder of captured soldiers and civilians, and the rape of thousands of women, later became iconic as the "Rape of Nanking". This study will investigate the facts of publication of the images from Nanking in the weeks and months following the event, in *LIFE* and *LOOK* magazines, two new United States photograph journals competing with each other and with the newsreels. They claimed a readership of seventeen million and one million respectively. The photograph journals' images were Japanese soldiers' 'souvenir stills', not meant for publication, but smuggled out of China to the West. Several western observers in the International Safety Zone filmed evidence of the human trag-

edy surreptitiously, but their images did not appear in newsreels until several years later. The publication of the still and moving atrocity photographs were a kind of novelty, signaling a shift in what public decorum would now tolerate. A few years later, the bloodbath of World War II achieved a new reality. As Susan Sontag generalized, photographs were a species of rhetoric that reiterated, simplified, agitated and created an illusion of consensus. Their daily pervasiveness during the conflict perhaps began to dull, if not corrupt the senses leading to our contemporary world of image saturation that Sontag believed diminishes morality and even numbs viewers to the point of indifference. If brutal images from Spain's civil war had begun this decade's cascade of horror in 1936, the Nanking images elevated shock effect. Incidentally, they helped to sell millions of magazines (Sontag, 1977). Sontag extended these thoughts in a provocative article in 2002 (Sontag, 2002).

By the 1930's photo-magazines were recognizable adjuncts of the news business in Europe, the Soviet Un-

ion and the United States. Two features about them are striking:

Photographs dominated their pages and the stories were generally simple or captions alone. They appealed to a readership that was, as an aggregate, young and more inclined to learn from pictures than from written sources. Second, these media tended to serve as mirrors and reinforcements of the dominant ideology of the country of origin. In Britain, for example, *Picture Post* came into existence in October 1938 and under the editorial guidance of Stefan Lorant and Tom Hopkinson, devoted itself to reflecting the national mood as the economically depressed nation slid toward the precipice of war while also appealing to the perennial whimsies of a young generation (Hopkinson, 1970). Its picture stories combined social comment with reportage to promote a kind of left-liberal humanitarianism to which the establishment had to adapt. Importantly, it introduced 'new ways of seeing' derived from radical publishing in Europe into the commercial culture that appealed to a new and growing audience. The multiple characteristics of picture magazines was their reductive simplicity, emotional appeal, and yet serious intent to inform. In the United States, *Life* and *Look* magazines shared these values as business ventures trying to build a readership of millions and to compete with newsreels to deliver the visual rhetoric of a world in action. Of course there were exceptions to the *Life* and *Look* approach. For example, Agee and Evans "Let Us Now Praise Famous Men", originally produced for *Fortune* magazine with governmental financing, was unique in its even-handed grappling of what Agee called the "cruel radiance of what is" of America's hard edged social realities. It was also reminiscent of the more sober *Illustrated America* and *Harper's Weekly* in the 1890s.

Edward Bernays and Walter Lippmann were influential thinkers in the 1920s who explored the role of public opinion in a democracy. The former was especially important in articulating the rules of modern advertising while the latter believed that in a democracy, an educated elite should direct and manipulate public opinion. Both built upon an existing understanding that emotions kindled by imagery tended to be an effective way to reach the millions of malleable citizens. Lippmann had said it was impossible to credibly inform the masses on important issues and then ask them to decide; decision was the job of the educated elite. John Grierson, a Scotsman from Britain who was studying public opinion in the United States at the University of Chicago, argued with Lippmann and claimed that half the equation was valid: it was possible, he believed, to use the emotional appeal of imagery to educate and motivate the individual in order to give him a the feeling of having a stake in society. Grierson returned to Britain to apply the power of visual rhetoric to documentary film. Besides informing and moving the viewer, he found one great strength of film was its appeal

to the young, to the marginally educated, and to those semi-literate who did not read much at all. He understood that the typical citizen was more adrift than not, and that emotional imagery, in the form of the creative treatment of actuality, provided another form of factual education. He claimed the purpose of documentary was propaganda as education; its images could create democratic loyalties and intelligent understanding of the contemporary world. Grierson never denied that given a typical audience, documentary film, photojournalism and newsreel photography all exhibited a lack of intellectual rigor. They tended toward the sensational and sentimental, but those were the elements that impelled millions to act. In the complex world of the 1930s, there was a concerted struggle to use images to attract the loyalties of their citizens (Evans, 1984).

Whether they were images from the Spanish Civil War or Japanese depredations in Asia, the object of the new visual culture was to treat the unimagined experience and to render it emotional. Images of children figured often because they were blameless victims of social circumstances. As we shall see, the photograph of a child casualty in the 1937 Japanese bombardment of Shanghai's railway station evoked cognitive emotional empathy, moral awareness, and identification with alien victimization. That photo, whether candid or arranged, became so iconic, that today it stands as a life-like sculpture that a visitor sees first when entering the Nanking Massacre Memorial Hall (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Baby Ping-Mei. Source: Karin Doerr.

Because Asia remained an alien bailiwick for western correspondents, there were not many still and moving images that had emerged from China, at war with Japan since 1931. If the American public's reaction to the still photographs from Nanking was generally one of shock, there seemed to be a somewhat indifferent long-term emotional involvement, due likely to inherent western racism or the remoteness of a conflict that was 3000 miles away. Archibald MacLeish once referred to such reaction as "the superstition of distance", being so far away, a viewer might conclude that

violence, lies and murder on another continent were not believable (Stott, 1978). Racism, remoteness, incredulity, and paucity of correspondents are elements that anchor this study of the Nanking Atrocity's images.

As George Roeder Jr. stated in his seminal study of the American visual experience in World War II, it is difficult to assume precisely measurable or predictable effects of still and moving images upon public opinion in wartime America (Roeder, 1993). The same applies prior to the war, although there was significant interest in visual depiction of world events, from Spain's civil war to Japanese militarism in Asia. In January 1938 the American public flocked to see to the newsreel footage of the Japanese bombing of the American cruiser *Panay* outside Nanking. It was a vicariously lived experience, and not long afterward, *Life* and *Look's* still photographs of the Japanese depredations within the city probably added to growing American outrage at Japan. Linfield embraces the power of photography and takes issue with Sontag's criticism of the medium's deep emotional bite. He also rebukes intellectuals like Barthes, Berger and key postmodernists who probed an image's spectacle, emotion and absence of context. (Linfield, 2010). In the context of the time, emotion triggered moral revulsion and both elements reinforced the humanist western tradition.

Still it took years and actual war for the smuggled Nanking atrocity film clips to circulate in American and Canadian newsreels. In the United States, as part of basic training, millions of recruits saw the *Why We Fight* series in which the virulent phrase the 'Rape of Nanking' became a popular slogan; millions more saw the same series in and out of theatres. In Canada, these and other film images were matched to a caricature of the duplicitous Japanese enemy as individually trustworthy yet collectively treacherous. The residual impact of these and the still photographs that Americans saw cannot be measured scientifically, but in the modernist tradition of moral integrity, their propaganda value was clear. Once war came, the American newsreel treatment of the Japanese aggressors was overtly racist; the Canadian propaganda effort, headed by John Grierson, used actual and manufactured atrocity footage to demonstrate fanatic Japanese militarism in order to strengthen Canadian national morale. The lasting (anti-Japanese racial) impression created by Canadian theatrical newsreels would impel the public, already bitter over Japanese abuse of Canadian prisoners of war, to mobilize in common purpose. If one American epithet referred to the Japanese racially as "buck-toothed," Canadians saw Chinese-staged (black propaganda) images of Japanese soldiers attacking women and bayonetting a baby. For both countries, the newsreels' use of gruesome Nanking images accompanied by a cascade of explanatory verbiage and moral invective reflected an informational world where news was as much about emotional imagery as about fact.

As applied to today's geopolitical tensions between China and Japan, images and words continue to resonate regarding events related to Nanking (Fogel, 2000). (If China uses the event to promote nationalism, it simultaneously reins in overenthusiastic activists). The best-selling book by the late Chinese-American author, Iris Chang, echoed the Holocaust as a paradigm of memorial culture, referring to the Nanking tragedy in her title as 'the forgotten holocaust' causing instant controversy for its inaccurate association with the genocide of Europe's Jews (Chang, 1997; Yoshida, 2006; Wakabayashi, 2007). The latter book of contributions by sixteen authors deals with an overview of the event, the debate over victim figures, perpetrators and collaborators, and the ongoing issue of Japanese denial. Its detailed methodology points the way for other researchers to follow. The Japanese deniers' argument is that most Chinese civilian deaths resulted from justifiable legal battlefield actions against unlawful combatants who were armed or had access to arms in the Nanking Safety Zone. They maintain (ignoring the illegal invasion and occupation of China) that no deliberate massacre took place for which Japan must apologize or pay compensation. Wakabayashi's figures of 40,000 to 200,000 victims from August to December 1937 reduce the issue to an argument about numbers. Numerically speaking, the Nanking count of between 40,000 and 369,000 victims pales next to the Jewish losses of between 5.2 and 5.8 million. If the Japanese unleashed deadly weaponry against Nanking's prisoners of war and committed rape and pillage of numerous civilians, the Germans committed wholesale industrial murder against their victims, root and branch. An historical irony is that in 1938, LIFE magazine referred to the tragedy of Nanking as a "holocaust", seven years before that word took on its contemporary meaning referring to the judeocide.

In 2007–2008, the Chinese diaspora was reminded of the memory of the atrocity both in print and in three films by Chinese, Japanese, and western filmmakers. These films present the subject from each national optic. (Ho, 2007, *Nanking Christmas 1937*; Mizushima, 2007, *The Truth About Nanjing*; Gutentag and Sturman, 2007, *Nanking*. Ang Lee's (2007) *Lust, Caution* is a romantic drama set during the occupation of Shanghai while *City of Life and Death* by Chuan, (2009) is a mainland China production that is suffused with the violence, death and sexual depredations associated with the Nanking Atrocity.

Debate continues to revolve around Japan's refusal to acknowledge fully and publicly its responsibility as a perpetrator. The impressment of Korean women as sex slaves is now a more familiar issue while Nanking is a less cited symbol of Japanese sexual ravages of Nanking women and the related brutality of its civilians. This may be because none of the world economic powers wishes old wounds to cause a breach in the thrust

of today's consumerist world economy. Besides, China is very reluctant to allow the genie of public anger to percolate through its population, lest it lead to unintended political consequences for itself. This study concludes that the images and doctored footage from Nanking should be included as part of understanding a general cultural shift that accorded visual images a new respect. What remains difficult to gauge is the impact of exposure to these barbaric images. Then, they were part of the need to mobilize public opinion for war. Today, one hopes they will not be used out of context as part of a growing public acceptance of, or indifference to the saturation of obscene images. If employed judiciously and in context, they may lead new generations of students of World War II to grasp the impact of visual imagery on mass populations.

2. Background

Japan had set up a puppet regime in Manchuria following its 1931 invasion. In July 1937, using a skirmish as a pretext to attack Shanghai, Japan launched a full scale invasion of China proper. Nationalist forces under Chiang Kai-Shek fought fiercely, but were defeated by aerial bombardment and superior Japanese troops. Chinese nationalist armies withdrew to the capital of Nanking, slowing the Japanese advance by using a scorched earth policy that left the enemy no food and little shelter, a policy that caused the Chinese civilian population much grief. The Japanese were surprised by the ferocity of the nationalist forces' resistance and vowed revenge. Nanking's pre-invasion civilian population of one million was already reduced by up to three quarters before the Japanese assault by 200,000 troops. When they reached Nanking in December, the Chinese nationalists had laid waste key buildings and moved the capital to Chungking. Chiang withdrew the majority of his troops, leaving 75,000 to defend the city. As the invaders took and sealed off Nanking, 50,000 Japanese soldiers unleashed a campaign of unrestrained brutality. Emperor Hirohito's uncle, Prince Asaka, issued an order, "Kill All Captives". This encouraged lower echelon Japanese officers, short of supplies and anxious to build morale, to issue a policy of "Burn All, Loot All, Kill All".

Unobserved by world media and contradicting their own propaganda about kind Japanese soldiers, Japanese forces engaged in a murderous rampage until the end of January 1938. They sought out and machine-gunned or bayoneted tens of thousands of Chinese soldiers who had surrendered. The victims believed they were to be imprisoned, not shot by gunners hidden behind camouflaged walls. Thousands more civilian males of military age met a similar fate. In the final disgrace, troops raped indiscriminately some 20,000 Chinese women and girls, many of whom they murdered. The postwar Tokyo Tribunal established the

"traditionalist" victim total of 300,000 killed and 20,000 raped, figures that have been used ever since. Present research estimates of Chinese murdered vary widely from 40,000 (by Japanese authors) to over 369,000 (by Chinese authors). Rapes are even more difficult to document because of the shame and stigma associated with victims of this crime. Yamamoto (2000) discusses the two approaches that now characterize interpretations of the Rape of Nanking as traditionalist and revisionist. He spends considerable effort detailing extant figures on the killings, but concludes that wide divergences between Japanese and other sources keep from bringing both sides to closure. He spends much less energy discussing the rapes and other civilian depredations than he does arguing about numbers killed. He circumvents the elemental question of Japanese aggression in China. Japan denies responsibility for letting loose and ordering its soldiers to perpetrate war crimes. Choy & Tong (1998) interviewed a number of Japanese veterans who confessed committing war crimes of pillage, rape and murder on orders from their officers. This makes the issue of numbers far less important than the issue of agency. One has only to follow the chain of command to realize that the Rape of Nanking is undoubtedly a war crime that was official (unwritten until documents prove otherwise) policy. Iris Chang transcribed several of these admissions in her essay "The Rape of Nanking" (Barstow, 2000). Similar ground is covered in the docudrama *Iris Chang: The Rape of Nanking* (Pick & Spahic, 2007).

The Chinese death toll debate began in the 1948 estimate of 200,000. This figure has been eclipsed by a recent statistic of 369,366, of which 190,000 were victims of mass killings and 150,000 were victims of random killings including rape. Japanese officer Toshio Ohta discussed body disposal at Xiaguan where 30,000 soldiers and 120,000 civilians including elders, women and children were disposed of. Revisionist scholarship of the 1990s challenged this so-called traditionalist interpretation and cut by more than half the 300,000 plus figure, though the figure of at least 20,000 or more rapes is not challenged.

In collapsing Nanking, journalists Hallett Abend and Frank Tillman Durdin of *The New York Times* reported on the unfolding tragedy on 10–11 December 1937. Their photographs depicted Chinese refugees, some waiting to be admitted to the "safe" International Safety Zone that foreign residents had established. As the city fell, journalists left Nanking to file their stories in Shanghai. They were not allowed to return until the end of January. So there were neither photographs nor western journalists to witness the fall of Nanking on 14 December. In fact, the news focus shifted dramatically on 13 December, when *The New York Times* reported that Japanese planes had attacked the American gunboat *Panay* not far from Nanking, resulting in the loss of several lives. The *Times*' photograph showed the *Panay* in its death throes after its crew and passengers

had abandoned ship. For the next three weeks, the sinking of the *Panay* remained front page news in many U.S. newspapers. The *Panay* story also played out nationally in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Des Moines Register*, the *Omaha World Herald*, the *Dallas News*, the *Little Rock Gazette*, the *Boise Idaho Statesman*, the *Phoenix Arizona Republican* and the *Kansas City Star*.

On 15–17, 19–21, 25, 26, and 28 December, the lead stories in the *Times* dealt with Japan's insistence the *Panay* attack was an error, for which it proffered apologies (and eventual restitution). In the midst of the hysteria about the gunboat, Durdin filed a story from Shanghai on 17 December that news reports of atrocities at Nanking were like "...stories of war hundreds of years ago...when...a conquered city with its helpless inhabitants should be given over for twenty-four hours to the unbridled lust of the victors" (Durdin, 17 December, 1937). He concluded, "[the] terrorized population lives in fear of death, torture and robbery". On 18 December, under the banners "Butchery Marked Capture of Nanking" and "All Captives Slain", he reported the blanket looting and violation of women with a detailed description of Japanese depredations and rapes. He reported on 27 December that chaos and anarchy were facts in Japanese-occupied provinces; the story included a picture of Japanese troops marching to Nanking, but none from the city itself.

On the same day, *LIFE* published a pictorial essay on the *Panay*, using frames from the film that two newsreel photographers, Norman Alley and Eric Mayell, had shot while on board the doomed vessel. The ship sinking was the main story, and absence of dramatic photographs left the Nanking collapse a poor second. In the pre-television age, the public had developed an appetite for the visually stimulating experience of the newsreel (Figure 2).

The next day, the *Times* played up the *Panay* incident not only because American national honor had been compromised, but also because there was a film record of the attack on their neutral ship. The footage was speeding its way across the ocean and continent, soon to appear in newsreels. This raised significant public anticipation and on 30 December, newsreel theatres reported lines around the block. This fed the *Panay* hysteria even more. *LIFE* reported that audiences allegedly broke into repeated applause after seeing the heroism of the ship's officers and civilians. Few knew that President Roosevelt had asked that the most damning footage, showing Japanese planes coming at the *Panay* at deck level, be censored. This was probably because negotiations regarding Japan's willingness to apologize and indemnify the United States were at a critical juncture. The footage was cut. Washington learned through code breaking that atrocities were occurring in Nanking but their source remained top secret. Without newsreel footage and correspondents'

confirmation from Nanking, the public remained focused on the *Panay* spectacle. For three weeks, newspapers in the United States made so much of the *Panay* sinking, that the Nanking Atrocity took a poor second in influencing pro-China and anti-Japan public opinion. By November, 1938, United States direct aid to China grew from \$20 million to \$100 million. As well, national support grew for an embargo against Japan. (Perlmutter, 1998).



Figure 2. Sinking of the *SS Panay*. Source: The Denver Post/ Getty Images.

One can argue that the public's response to the *Panay* sinking took precedence because it was obvious that there was a shared national concern about the fate of one of its ships. It was only much later that stories appeared in mainstream print outlets like *Time*, *Reader's Digest* and *Far Eastern* filed by the western witnesses in the Nanking International Safety Zone. By then, time had diminished the newsworthy immediacy of the event (Brook, 2000). The newsreel footage of the sinking of the *Panay* is available free online.

Henry Luce owned *LIFE*, *TIME* and *FORTUNE* magazines. Born in China to American missionary parents, he remained a lifelong champion of his birthplace and was probably America's most cogent pro-China spokesperson. (Herzstein, 2005; Perlmutter, 2007). The Luce press' portrayal of China as victim of Japanese aggression spurred the United States to enact embargoes on sales of critical resources such as oil, which set the stage for Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.

Luce had launched *LIFE* as a weekly news magazine in November 1936, with a strong emphasis on photojournalism. By 1938, he claimed its circulation was 17 million. With some prescience, a full week before the fall of Nanking, *LIFE* ran a cover picture of a Japanese soldier with a machine gun and the caption "Fatalist With Machine Gun". The issue featured Japan's conquest of Asia, with one story about Japanese soldiers, headlined "Japan's Army Slogs Down Asia on Schedule Time". To a long shot of Japanese soldiers marching, the caption remarked "happy at their work".

LOOK magazine, competing with the more popular *LIFE*, also celebrated America as a middle class experi-

ence. As a general-interest magazine, it cultivated a largely superficial approach to contemporary society, filling its pages with photographs of movie stars and casual or striking events. Because it took months to set up its biweekly issue, on 21 December 1937 *LOOK* ran a photomontage of the August 1937 bombing of Shanghai. It was a tragedy unrelated to the disaster unfolding in Nanking. Using frames of moving picture film shot by Hearst cameraman Wong Hai-Sheng, one shot became one of the most iconic of the prewar period, showing a baby sitting amidst the wreckage of a bombed out Shanghai railway station. (*LOOK* magazine, 21 December 1937) (Figure 3).

A full description of the photographs and captions follows. Title: "A Chinese Baby Survives an Air Raid", Text: "On August 28, while hundreds of terrified Chinese huddled in Shanghai's South Station, 16 Japanese planes bombed the building. Two hundred were killed. The dramatic rescue of a child survivor is pictured here."; Photo: "Chinese man picks up baby found lying on the railroad track at bombardment of train station in August 1937", Text: "An Infant Survivor of the Japanese bombardment of Shanghai's South Station was found lying on the railroad tracks half hidden under the wreckage. Here a young Chinese man picks up the infant, starts for the opposite platform"; Photo: "Man with baby picking way through wreckage", Text: "The Baby Howls as his rescuer picks his way through the wreckage. When the bombs struck South Station it was jammed with poor Chinese waiting to escape war-torn Shanghai on a train to the south. Two hundred were killed"; Photo: "Man crossing tracks nearing platform". Text: "They Near the Platform...Two squadrons of 8 planes each bombed the station. At the same time, they bombed Nantoo, a native residential section of South Shanghai. A civilian section, Nantoo was totally unprepared for the raid and the planes flew away unharmed after the bombing. Previously the Japanese had announced they might issue a warning if Nantoo were to be bombed, but the actual attack came without warning"; Photo: "Rescuer leaves baby on platform", Text: "Rescuer Leaves the Terrified Baby on the platform and returns to the wreckage to help other victims of the raid. Then a child and man approach to take the baby to a near- by first aid station. At the right lies the body of a 14-year-old boy, one of the 15 children found dead in the raid. In bombing Shanghai, Japan struck at China's largest, wealthiest city. Planes also have bombed Nanking, China's capital"; Photo: "A child lies on a stretcher as adult hands tend to his wounds", Text: "Lying on a Stretcher on a sidewalk, the baby receives first aid from a Chinese boy scout...Three weeks later, on the occasion of the Japanese bombing of Nanking, the governments of the U.S., Britain and France sent a note of protest to the Japanese government against the bombing of civilian populations. But aerial raids continue, with an increasing toll of dead. Chinese bombers and gunners, as well as Japanese, have been

responsible for some of the deaths of innocent non-combatants—American and European as well as Oriental—in this undeclared war" (International News photographs).

LOOK's account of the barbarity of Japanese aerial warfare shocked the world. An estimated 136 million people saw the shot on newsreel screens or in print. (Fielding, 1972; Jespersen, 1996).

It became iconic for sharing four traits: wide recognition, being a historically significant event, for evoking a strong emotional response, and for enjoying widespread reproduction. (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007)

Time's circulation was 1,000,000. The photo's effect was so powerful that when Madame Chiang Kai-Shek arrived in the United States five years later, a New Jersey homemaker sent her a letter with three dollars to "help the little guy on the railroad tracks somewhere in China".

United China Relief used this iconic image to sell millions of Christmas cards and to raise millions of dollars for Chinese aid. Titled the Ping Mei card, the reverse side read: "This is Ping Mei—a child of China—...he is one of 50 million refugees who desperately need food, clothing, shelter, medical aid". *Time* magazine published it too, while appealing for money and underscoring the common interest and goals shared by the Chinese and Americans.

LOOK's use of emotive captions added weight to the frames of the bombed railway station. Its two-page feature titled "A Chinese Baby Survives an Air Raid" displayed five frames including the above mentioned event with a Chinese rescuer in the image (Figure 4).

A first picture explained the image of a Chinese man picking up the infant lying on the railroad tracks half hidden under the wreckage. A second still showed the man carrying the baby through the wreckage. A third photograph had him crossing the track to a platform while the caption explained the unannounced Japanese attack on this civilian facility. A fourth photograph depicted the infant, an older child standing next to his rescuer, the wreckage, and a dead child lying on the tracks nearby. The caption read: "...a child and man approach (above) to take the baby to a near-by first aid station. At the right lies the body of a 14-year-old boy, one of the 15 children found dead in the raid. In bombing Shanghai, Japan struck at China's largest, wealthiest city. Planes also have bombed Nanking, China's capital". The shameful image of the lone infant victim was evocative propaganda, a picture triggering a natural human response of revulsion. This iconic image helped construct a collective memory about the horrors of Japanese aggression and public discourse revolved around it as the Luce publishing empire helped keep it alive. Of course, the assertion that iconic images dominate public opinion is grounded on the assumption of the importance of individual predispositions and values. (Perlmutter, 1998, 2007; Mitchell, 1994)



Figure 3. Baby Ping-Mei. Source: LOOK Magazine.



Figure 4. Filmed images of baby Ping-Mei. Source: LOOK Magazine.



Figure 5. Rescue of baby Ping-Mei. Source: LOOK Magazine.

Situating the photograph in a related, but different context, a final photograph caption, titled "Lying on a Stretcher", depicted the infant on a sidewalk, receiving "first aid from a Chinese boy scout..." The text continued, "three weeks later, on the occasion of the Japanese bombing of Nanking, the governments of the U.S., Britain and France sent a note of protest to the Japanese government against the bombing of civilian populations. But aerial raids continue, with an increasing toll of dead. Chinese bombers and gunners, as well as Japanese, have been responsible for some of the deaths of innocent non-combatants—American and European as well as Oriental—in this undeclared war" International News photographs. (LOOK, 21 December 1937)

The undoctored newsreel footage indeed revealed a tragic and hopeful moment, the rescue of a baby after Japan bombed the railway station, intentionally or not. Yet the arrangement of film frames could lead a doubter or denier to claim that perhaps the entire event was staged for the camera or the baby was placed on the track after his rescue and then left to cry. The more significant historical fact remains that this child became the

icon that spoke of Japan's careless attack on innocents in a civilian locale. One notes how different the film clip appears compared with the verbiage attached to the still frames.

While it is difficult to measure the impact of this visual news item in isolationist America, a Gallup Poll taken late in 1937 revealed that if the Ohio floods interested Americans most in the preceding year (28.3%), the Sino-Japanese war had practically the same effect (27.8%). By May 1939, seventeen months after the Nanking atrocities, polls revealed that sympathy for Chinese rose from 43% in August 1937 to 74% (Jespersen, 1996)

Having covered the *Panay* story in December exclusively, *LIFE* did not want to be scooped by *LOOK*, so its editors ran a grisly photograph on 10 January 1938: a severed Chinese head with a cigarette in its mouth (Figure 6). The macabre text read in dramatic language that echoed *Time* magazine: "Chinese head whose owner was incorrigibly anti-Japanese, wedged in barbed wire barricade outside Nanking just before the city fell December 14...Quite possibly the worst holocaust in modern history took place behind an official news silence in China's capture capital of Nanking between December 10 and 18...In the indescribable confusion the Japanese shot down everyone seen running or caught in a dark alley. In the safety zone 400 men were tied together and marched off to be shot. A few uninvestigated cases of rape were reported...The Japanese army permitted organized looting by its men presumably because its supplies are getting low..."

The graphic description adds to the disgust this image provokes. Roeder (1993) notes atrocity photographs of Caucasian victims were generally not published. The fact was that once World War II began, *LIFE* was so reluctant to publish images of American dead, that its first such photograph appeared only in September 1943, eleven months after the soldiers depicted had died in battle. *LIFE's* editorial decision to let the Nanking photograph out reflected a double standard: the Oriental as Other and a feeling that many viewers would consider the sight of Orientals murdering each other as nothing more than a confirmation of Asian barbarism, as opposed to eliciting sympathy, horror or motivating action.



Figure 6. Severed Chinese head. Source: AP Photo.

The article ignored the issue of widespread rape, choosing a photograph of a Chinese father carrying a baby mortally wounded by a Japanese bomb fragment and another of Chinese soldiers and civilians at a city gate with Japanese soldiers hauling carts of looted supplies. Its caption read, "The organized looting of Nanking would indicate that the Japanese Army Commissariat needs food more than prestige". A two-page photograph spread followed, of Nanking refugees on 5 December fleeing on a Yangtze riverboat. The text defended the Nationalists' scorched earth policy as the way to defeat the Japanese (*LIFE*, 10 January 1938).

While both *LOOK* and *LIFE* had published photo-montages reporting the military debacle in Nanking, because virtually all correspondents had been evacuated, there were no visuals conveying the scope of violations and breadth of the massacre. *LOOK* ran a feature on war propaganda on 15 February 1938 without defining what constituted war propaganda, good or bad. One page was devoted to Shanghai victims, depicting an old woman and a child, a mother nursing her infant, and another carrying her child through Shanghai streets. The pain of innocent civilians was clear, yet public decorum still demanded avoidance of the obscenity of death and blood.

On 18 April *LIFE* covered the Nanking massacre again with text that informed the American public of the depredations in detail. "These are the same soldiers who through last Christmas and New Year's treated Nanking, China's captured capital, to the most appalling mass atrocity since Genghis Khan. They raped Chinese women by the thousands, bayoneted and burned unarmed Chinese men alive in equal numbers, suffered the inevitable loss of morale. Since then the Japanese have been stopped and defeated by the Chinese" (*LIFE*, 18 April, 1938).

The photograph of Japanese soldiers dozing harmlessly in a Chinese temple did nothing to illuminate or nuance the text. Three weeks later, *LIFE* displayed a series of photographs of Chinese child actors touring the countryside in a propaganda play about Chinese farmers uniting against a Japanese bully. In order to widen the propaganda effect of Chinese resistance, on 16 May, *LIFE* put a head shot of a determined looking Chinese soldier on its cover with the caption "Defender of China".

The accompanying feature boasted (incorrectly) that China was putting the Japanese army on the run and that China's odds to win were better than 50-50.

A powerful addition was a series of ten photographs of Japanese atrocities, frames taken from unattributed film footage. American missionary John Magee had filmed hospitalized victims surreptitiously in the International Safety Zone during the chaos, and fellow American John Fitch smuggled this footage out of China early in 1938. Fitch circulated it to limited American audiences to inform them of Japanese brutality, but

exhausted by his efforts, he soon ceased his one-man campaign. Perhaps because events in distant Asia had less resonance than almost daily Eurocentric news, the film lay dormant until 1942, when portions of it appeared in a Canadian newsreel.

George Fitch, who had been in Nanking, smuggled the Magee film out of China and circulated it to many civic groups in the prewar period in an effort to convince Washington to cease selling scrap metal to Japan. Poor health prevented him from showing the film more frequently and he gave it to Arthur N. Bierkle who screened it to groups mainly in southern California. Wider dissemination occurred when *The March of Time* used some of the footage in 1942 and Frank Capra used segments in his wartime series *Why We Fight: The Battle for China*, 1944 (Kuykendall, 1996).

The abovementioned stills were preceded by the text: "The most dreadful picture of the rape of Nanking this amateur photographer could not take. He knew that if he filmed civilians being shot down or houses looted and burned, he would be arrested and his camera smashed. Besides he was too busy, like other foreign missionaries and doctors, saving what civilians he could. But for two weeks he saw an army completely out of control, raping, burning, killing and robbing and destroying without check. He saw a Japanese embassy completely powerless to restrain its own men. In foreign hospitals in and around Nanking he saw hundreds of innocent victims of 'totalitarian war'".

Accompanying each photograph was an explanation: 1. Wounded Chinese in primitive basket who was transported to emergency facility. 2. Survivor of family of 11 standing among bodies 3. Wounded woman whose husband and child were killed. 4. Disfigured burned man, tied with 100 others, doused with gasoline. 5. Man with bayonet gashes, who refused to yield his women to Japanese. 6. Woman nearly decapitated 7. A 14-year-old boy beaten with an iron bar. 8. Man (police) struck with axe, recovering in hospital after feigning death by firing squad. 9. A 19-year old woman stabbed 29 times, later had a miscarriage in a refugee hospital. 10. Body left to rot in roadside pond.

Six months after the fact, these were among the most inflammatory photographs of the Asian conflict ever shown to the American public and an early use of the term "Rape of Nanking". These must be added to evidence that was steering (a still largely isolationist) United States public opinion to a stronger pro-Chinese/anti-Japanese position. The next week, a photograph essay described Chinese troops going into action and achieving a victory; a week after that, war photographer Robert Capa's photographs depicted Chinese civilians witnessing air battles over the city of Hankow. Capa's images of war would become icons of the era even though these photographs of a mourning Chinese mother and the city of Canton under fierce Japanese bombardment were not reproduced in the millions as

were those of baby Ping Mei. The text predicted accurately that these images of dead and wounded and a city destroyed were curtain raisers to the next war in Europe (*LIFE*, 30 May and 20 June, 1938). *LIFE* had shot its bolt as these were the last Nanking references in 1938. China appeared in eight more issues, but nothing was as sensational as the Nanking photographs (*LIFE* 1, 15, August; 17 October; 7, 14 and 21 November, 1938).

Notwithstanding *LIFE*'s larger readership, in November it was *LOOK* that delivered the most graphic photographs of Japanese outrages (probably in Nanking), including the Japanese bayoneting of Chinese prisoners of war while soldiers watched (Figure 7). The *LOOK* captions were as graphic as the pictures. Under the headline "Killing For Fun!" the text read: "Hands Tied, Chinese prisoners are used as live targets for bayonets of Japanese recruits. In the foreground a captive is being tormented. Another (left rear) is being stabbed to death. A third (center) has just received the death thrust. A fourth (rear) is being driven into the pit" (*LOOK*, 22 November 1938). This photo was cropped and published again on 20 December, 1938.

Additional text on the page charged the Japanese with butchering Chinese and burying them alive, merely for amusement, or to inspire raw recruits to kill. The writer explained:

"We are sending you some pictures of killers in the act of killing. We have plenty of hard boiled correspondents here—Steele of the *Chicago Tribune*, Durdin of the *New York Times*, Beldon, an ex-United Press reporter, Victor Keen of the *New York Herald Tribune*, and others and all of them reckoned the pictures to be the worst things they had ever seen in China, bombing aftermaths and battlefields thrown in. The pictures were taken in Nanking and Soochow recently, that can be judged by the fact that the men are in their summer uniforms. In other words, the killings happened at least six months after the occupation of those cities, when some blood lust, however bad, was to be expected. Thus, these pictures must come under the heading of diversion, or else the executions were staged to put the killer instinct into freshly drafted troops. The Japanese soldier-photographers sent the films to Shanghai for developing and printing. They sent them to a Japanese-owned shop and Chinese employees did the natural thing in exceeding the original printing order. Hence these pictures found the light. These Sons of Heaven went one worse than the Romans who, even if they sent their gladiators into the arena wearing half-inch armor, at least gave their victims a short sword and a sporting chance. As you will perceive, all these Chinese soldiers and civilians were led into the killing pit with their arms pinioned."

Captions explained that these were Japanese recruits at

bayonet drill. Using Chinese prisoners as targets was a practice that was considered the proper way to season newcomers. This photograph was among sixteen souvenir photographs taken by Japanese soldiers. Duplicated secretly, these grisly images made their way to the West eventually and the entire set was used at the postwar Nanking War Crimes Trial in Tokyo (1946–1948).

On the following page, a photograph depicted Japanese soldiers watching execution of Chinese men. The caption read: "Rivers Run Red as Chinese are executed beside a stream. Several hundred Japanese soldiers are gathered around, watching the slaughter. The man in the foreground is toppling over dead. His head may be seen in the crook of his arm. The next victim is in place" (Figure 8).

A second picture claimed, "Five Chinese Prisoners are Buried Alive, in this, one of the most gruesome of all wartime pictures. Enraged by the stoic calm with which the Chinese defenders are meeting their attack, the Japanese are more determined than ever to bring them to their knees. This war, now in its third year, is one of the most brutal in history" (Figure 9).

A larger photograph depicted Japanese soldiers with fixed bayonets aimed at two bound Chinese, one tall, one short (Figure 10). The text stated: "The Big Boy Was Beheaded because he stepped on a telephone wire, but the Japanese soldiers spared the life of the little fellow. Because of a shortage of food, many prisoners in the bloody arena are beheaded. Both the Japanese and Chinese face death with a calmness astonishing to westerners" (*LOOK*, 22 November 1938).

Another image of live burials appeared in the journal *Pictorial Review* with a story by Betty Graham titled, "Hundreds of Thousands Slaughtered in New Wave of Bestial Jap Atrocities." The photo and article are reproduced in Young (1997). The best known contemporary written accounts were by Timperley (1938) and Smythe (1938).



Figure 7. Japanese soldiers bayonet Chinese prisoners. Source: Keystone/Getty Images.



Figure 8. Beheading a Chinese soldier. Source: Robyn Beck/Getty Images.



Figure 9. Burying Chinese prisoners alive. Source: Keystone/Getty Images.



Figure 10. Japanese abuse young Chinese captives. Source: LOOK Magazine.

The photographs' impact should be included in explaining a Gallup Poll rise in anti-Japanese American public opinion. In spite of the continuing coverage of the China warfront, Henry Luce's *LIFE* directed the majority of its efforts on events in Europe through 1938. If a photo's visual syntax is universally comprehensible, it is difficult to assert what the viewers' possible response to atrocity photographs would have been: perhaps a combination of horror, anger and to a lesser degree in isolationist America, a desire to punish the perpetrators.

Further bibliographic and philosophical speculation about atrocity photographs may be found in the earlier mentioned Sontag article in *The New Yorker*. Linfield (2010) believes that photojournalism has come to play a role in the establishment of human rights legislation. Other approaches to this subject are Messaris (1994), Taylor (1998) and Newton (2001).

A recent historiographical book on the moral, political and educational aspects of the atrocity surveyed Chinese, Japanese and transnational authors, but did not attempt to gauge the impact on public opinion that pictures like these had when circulated in the millions (Fogel, 2000).

Nanking disappeared from public discourse after 1938. Some found the atrocity stories too shocking, believing they were similar to (untruthful) black propaganda of World War I. Others had inverse attitudes: sympathy for the Chinese in Asia and prejudice to Chinese living in their city. Perhaps because of squeamishness about rape and barbarism (Eykholt, 2000), or because they violated standards of decency or because of general provincialism, (Bayly, 2005, 2007; Mitter, 2013) the Nanking horror slipped from public consciousness until America was at war. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 became America's rallying cry (Hotta, 2013). Only then did the 'Rape of Nanking' join wartime iconography. Deluca (2006) argues that in iconic images, iconic becomes transcendent and that images transform rhetoric, politics and history. He cites Walter Benjamin, who said we are immersed in a torrent of imagery that constitutes public discourse. There should be more methodological investigation of how the widely circulated newsreel images of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (especially footage of the exploding battleship *Arizona*) became iconic in convincing the American public to wage the Pacific war as a war of revenge.

In contrast to the United States, Canada had no weekly national pictorial magazine. Its primary national magazine, *Maclean's*, said nothing about the Nanking atrocity. Only in February 1938, did a columnist from London mention Japanese-British relations and a Japanese diplomat's cynical comment referring to *Chinese* aggression in Shanghai. The emphasis of *Maclean's* was exclusively Eurocentric, with a single reference in March to the possibility of war coming across the Pacific (*Maclean's*, 15 February and 15 March, 1938).

Taking *The Gazette (Montreal)* as a typical English Canadian newspaper, its coverage of the fall of Nanking had no photographs, was based on the Durdin and Abend articles in the *New York Times* on December 8, 10, and 11, 1937, and only once in December spoke of the Japanese soldiers' "breakdown of discipline." On January 25, in a dispatch from Shanghai headlined "Nanking Captors Run Amok", Abend claimed his sources were based on consular reports whose contents about assaults on women and very young girls were "actually unprintable." A day later, a *Gazette* editorial reiterated the *Times*' story and explained that Japan had forbidden foreign reporters to cable responsible editorial comments. On February 8 an article stated that General Matsui admitted that the army had run amok in Nanking, 'raping Chinese women, shooting private citizens and looting property.' Japanese military authorities' admitted that the depredations were "blunders." As shocking as this singular news coverage was, the Canadian press did not purchase the extant images to follow-up the story. These were the sole references to the Nanking atrocities. In the linguistic and cultural gulf that existed between Asia and Canada, the long history of ethnocentricity and conservatism demonstrated the failure of Nanking to register as anything more than a tragic fact.

3. American Newsreels and Nanking

One of the more puzzling elements surrounding the Nanking Atrocity is the American newsreels' failure to cover the event. Henry Luce's *The March of Time*, the premier newsreel series of its kind, ignored China in prewar issues, other than a March 1936 mention of Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria. Typically, its narration used "other" voices to mouth potentially hazardous judgments and one issue commented about militant Japan: "but as Japan's militarists march on behind their Emperor, observers may well wonder what a nation whose war dogs go mad at home might do if allowed to run loose throughout the world" (In December 1937, after the Japanese sinking of the *USS Panay*, nationalist rhetoric inflamed anti-Japanese public opinion.

The *March of Time* series was a barometer of the growing influence of moving images upon news. It became the most widely distributed newsreel in the United States with an audience of 12 million viewers in 5236 theatres in 168 cities. If there was a dearth of, or no footage available, series director Louis de Rochemont used re-enactment freely and made decisions on what to run. Luce intervened rarely, if only to make Chiang Kai Shek a sacred cow (Fielding, 1978).

In a prewar issue titled "Japan-Master of the Orient", the narrator reviewed Japan's "record of shameful unprovoked aggression" without alluding to the horrors of Nanking. Hesitant to condemn the whole of Japan, he stated, "Sober Japanese wonder fearfully how long the

patience of the great western nations will brook this lawless threat to the peace of the world." In December 1941 "Battlefields of the Pacific" dealt with Japanese military aggression generally. In fact, between January 1942 and August 1945, the series analyzed the Pacific war in only four issues, *Crisis in the Pacific, China Fights Back, The Philippines and Australia at War*. There was only one general newsreel devoted to China. *The March of Time* mentioned Nanking just once in 1942. Ignoring China echoed prewar American isolationist sentiment, owner Henry Luce's *laissez faire* policy toward the series, its Eurocentric outlook, and/or Louis de Rochemont's indifference toward the Chinese. Not surprisingly, after December 1941, American interest in the Pacific revolved around concern for American servicemen exclusively.

In contrast, a sobering treatment of the Japanese enemy occurred in one of the War Department's propaganda series *Why We Fight*, made under the supervision of celebrated Hollywood director Frank Capra. In "The Battle of China" (1944), John Magee's Nanking footage was integrated into Chinese-manufactured atrocity images that had appeared in an earlier Canadian newsreel from the National Film Board. Actuality images included a point blank execution of two bound Chinese prisoners, accompanied by the following narration, "But again, Japanese power was too great and after a battle lasting but a few days, the city fell to the invaders. In their occupation of Nanking, the Japs outdid themselves in barbarism. The Japanese soldiers went berserk. They raped and tortured. They killed and butchered. In one of the bloodiest massacres in recorded history, they murdered 40,000 men women and children..."

The appalling images showed victims who had been stabbed, raped, set on fire or nearly beheaded and the graphic narration spared nothing. "...But those who lived might better have died, for the horror of their twisted and torn bodies was worse than death...This nightmare of cruelty was all the more horrible because it was deliberately planned by the Japanese high command to tear the heart out of the Chinese people once and forever."

One can surmise how engaging and effective this inflammatory imagery was, even if the audience for this film was much smaller than the first film in this series "Prelude to War", which was mandatory viewing for millions of American recruits. Released in the fall of 1944, "The Battle of China" was withdrawn briefly, and then reissued midway through 1945, reaching an audience of 3.75 million. One critic has labeled it Hollywood fairy-tale propaganda that strained credibility because it ignored Mao's communist armies (Communism was still a forbidden word in mainstream American media) and pretended that China was expelling the Japanese invader.

The images trigger revulsion, but the propaganda

objective was to engage viewers to believe that the Chinese themselves would defeat the enemy. The narration boasted, "...And then it happened. That which Sun Yat Sen had dreamed of, that which Chiang Kai-Shek had toiled for, that which is stronger than stone walls that had surrounded China: the will to resist. In their last bloody blow the Japanese had accomplished that which four thousand years had failed to bring into being—a united China..." Accompanying this verbiage were pictures of Chinese leaders exhorting their people, reiterating the message of unity. The race card was played more viciously as the narration concluded that Japan planned to conquer North America and the world when "the Germans would join with their buck-toothed pals coming over from Siberia." If nothing else, racism could be counted on to generate emotion.

4. Canadian Newsreels and Asia

For its part, Canada's military engagement in Asia had proven to be disastrous in 1941 with the fall of Hong Kong and the ignominious surrender of two ill trained and unseasoned Canadian battalions. 557 Canadians perished in battle or in Japanese prison camps (Morton, 1981).

Learning of Japanese brutality toward all prisoners of war, Canada's film propaganda chief, John Grierson, tried to rally morale without stoking racist fires. On the heels of these military fiascos, this was a difficult task, since the Canadian populace largely approved the government's racially motivated removal of Japanese Canadians from coastal British Columbia in 1942 (Granatstein & Neary, 1995).

Invited to Canada in 1939 to establish and then lead the National Film Board, Grierson produced morale building theatrical and nontheatrical short films monthly to inform citizens and soldiers. Emphasizing propaganda as "education", the films systematically shaped perceptions, manipulated cognitions and directed behavior (Grierson, 1946). Film Board productions included four theatrical issues on Asia from 1942 to 1944, *Inside Fighting China*, *The Mask of Nippon*, *When Asia Speaks* and *Fortress Japan*. These newsreels, reaching two million at home and up to ten million internationally, defined Canada's Asian propaganda strategy: to vilify Japanese aggression, not the Japanese people. In July 1942 *Inside Fighting China* showed the film clip of Japanese executing Chinese captives. Lorne Greene, the paternal voice of democracy in Canada's wartime newsreels, asserted soberly that the Japanese were using liquid fire, gas, and bacterial warfare to butcher civilians and soldiers. The narration concluded that China, with communists and nationalists united, was destroying the myth of Nippon the invulnerable. There was no mention of the Nanking atrocity.

Grierson's propaganda approach was ideologically simple: portray the Japanese as individually trustworthy but collectively treacherous. This theme was cen-

tral to *The Mask of Nippon*, in September 1942. The film began with a crude physical characterization of Japanese soldiers as "little men, quick and wiry; their uniforms slovenly, their faces, even in the heat of battle, tawny masks, black, expressionless". There followed a series of quick cuts to Japanese troops in combat, and a shot of Japanese soldiers brutalizing a crowd of Chinese civilians, with one seizing and rough-handling a mother and child. Then another threw the child into the air as the other's bayonet pitched the child's body out of the frame. There followed clips of bound Chinese prisoners being thrown into a pit, being buried alive, shot at point blank range, and finally civilians dragging a corpse, literally in ribbons. The narration was accompanied by a chorus of female screams, heightened by a high pitched Oriental flute. This was the most atrocity-filled war footage ever shown to Canadians. The crowd scene, the burying alive of prisoners, the woman, and the bayoneted child were in fact staged, taken from a Chinese-made propaganda film and inserted as actuality footage along with segments of the Magee film. Mixing black (staged) and white (authentic) propaganda was allowable if the result articulated the true larger picture. The narration made reference neither to Nanking nor to the provenance of the footage. The evocative impact of soldiers bayoneting the child remained indelible as audiences would have absorbed the whole as "authentic". A number of stills from the staged sequences continue today to be used, (probably unknowingly), as actuality photographs from Nanking. A wall of verbiage, accompanied by stock iconography of Japanese cultural images, reminded the viewer that the enemy was dangerous, but beatable psychologically and militarily. In July 1944 *Fortress Japan* gave an account of the Allied advance on beleaguered Japan, using footage of dead Japanese soldiers to demonstrate that the Allied drive would break Japan's militaristic spirit: "And so, a nation which has ever held life cheap, prepares to practice once again its ancient arts of death..." Tom Daly, the editor, defended these Asia films, noting that they did not substitute emotional racism for a true thing nor did they deny the Japanese were intelligent people. He and director/writer Stuart Legg had no misgivings about using the Chinese-manufactured (black) propaganda to drive home the point. Black propaganda is usually defined as material where the role of the authorities is deliberately obscured, or where it appears to come from the people at which it is aimed. Audiences had no idea that the most brutal images were staged sequences (Figure 11).

5. Japanese Propaganda and the Nanking Atrocity

If Canada's propaganda tried to keep truth as its touchstone, the Japanese had no qualms about employing black propaganda in their sophisticated campaign to deny the Nanking atrocity. The Japanese public learned of the fall and occupation of Nanking through jingoist

headlines and newsreel pictures of the victory parade led by their triumphant general. *The Japan Advertiser* photo section boasted of a barbaric contest between two lieutenants as to who could behead more Chinese prisoners. The tally of 106 to 105 led them to call light-heartedly for a new contest to resolve which of them to name the "winner". After the war, the Allied War-time Tribunal used the celebrated "killing contest" photo to condemn the two to hanging for war crimes. Many in this culture that celebrated "bushido" never understood why (Figure 12).

Sanitized Japanese newsreels showed troops fighting their way into Nanking, followed by "Bonsai" victory salutes on the city walls. To offset rumors at home of civilian atrocities, Tokyo invited Japanese visitors to tour the city in January 1938. The tourists gave sweets to Chinese children and saw nothing of the ongoing rape and carnage. Japanese newsmen took pictures of "spontaneous" New-Year's celebrations in which gleeful residents also welcomed Japanese soldiers who handed out sweets (Figure 13). Other photographs depicted children receiving care from a Japanese medical doctor.

A few reports had the audacity to declare that the Chinese, not the Japanese, were responsible for the looting, raping and burning. The occupying forces also dropped leaflets promising food and clothing if the Chinese returned to their homes. Thousands of hopeful victims left refugee camps in response to a leaflet featuring a Japanese soldier holding a Chinese child in his arms and distributing rice by the bagful (Figure 14). Black propaganda beckoned Chinese to return to their homes to receive food and clothing. Undisciplined Japanese troops then victimized many who returned.

6. Conclusion

This study has argued that because the world was not yet buried in a surfeit of images, pictures commanded a degree of moral authority. Decades later, a stark post-modernist view articulated by Susan Sontag insisted that photographs from "the slaughter bench of history" do not necessarily induce pathos and sentiment, nor are they the source of ethical and political knowledge. She divorced moral and ethical judgment from the experience of viewing, in part because of the sheer volume of images in our daily lives. In contrast, John Taylor denies that the plethora of images provokes weariness and distrust, claiming instead that the very awfulness of images can and does define civility. Modernism needs reconsideration, he believes, and through it we remember the importance of images' connection to morality (Taylor, 1998). Observing the still photographs and newsreels devoted to Japanese ravages in Nanking, a number of salient points emerge. In the relatively new practice of twentieth century mass spectatorship, there came into being a new public discourse and public sphere in which media-generated imagery operated on both conscious and

unconscious levels (Newton, 2001). It is not possible to state with certainty the effect of the images upon the millions who view them, but it is likely that the widely circulated still photographs in *LIFE* and *LOOK* contributed to changing or confirming public opinion about militant Japan.



Figure 11. 'Child' (a doll) bayoneted in Chinese propaganda film. Source: National Film Board of Canada.



Figure 12. Japanese soldiers' killing contest. Source: The Japan Advertiser.



Figure 13. Japanese soldiers handing out sweets to Chinese children. Source: The Japan Advertiser.



Figure 14. Japanese propaganda in China. Source: Unknown Japanese.

Iconic photographs such as those of baby Ping Mei in the ruins of a Shanghai railway station or Japanese soldiers bayoneting Chinese POWs compelled a degree of moral awareness. Though the event was about far away alien victimization, the pain and identification they projected were, we believe, unmistakable. In 1937 the world was on the brink of conflagration and even if their impact is dulled by context and time, their power to summon humanist impulses then, stands in contrast to Sontag's insistence that images blunt morality and serve to promote pathos and sentiment (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007).

Earlier we observed the prewar sinking of the American gunboat *Panay*. It had a probable catalytic effect on the public that interpreted it emotionally as a national affront, not only because it was captured on film, but also because the press reinforced its importance for weeks. The lines of patrons at newsreel theatres demonstrated the American public's taste for "news" as images, as sentiment, and even in the prewar world, as a form of jingoist sport. Whatever the motivation, later public opinion surveys demonstrated American sympathies were measurably pro-China and anti-Japan following exposure to the visual and print information.

That said, the trauma of being a combatant in war produced a willingness in both the United States and Canada to use images as public opinion leaders em-

ploying white and black propaganda. One can appreciate how the "Rape of Nanking", synonymous with Japanese barbarity, assumed its iconic role. The 1942 and 1944 newsreel pictures of the Nanking atrocities reinforced anti-Japanese public opinion at the least. If John Magee's actuality footage from Nanking and staged images of panicked civilians in *The March of Time* stirred American audiences to demand revenge, so too did the lurid theatrical bayoneting of the child in Canada's newsreel, *The Mask of Nippon*. But propaganda chief John Grierson insisted that such images should be balanced by showing the human side of the Japanese; Canada's propaganda goal was to ensure that patterns of peace, not revenge, ultimately prevailed (Aitken, 1988; Evans, 2005). Being wartime, no one went on record to protest suspected image manipulation, a clear suspicion if one analyzes the perfectly positioned camera and actors. In Japan, the "killing contest" aside, (citizens in Japan's militarist society accepted the warrior's cliché Kill or Be Killed) the Japanese produced their own black propaganda to convince citizens of their humane treatment of the Chinese noncombatant population. One may conclude that if such images had their intended salutary effect, later evidence demonstrates they were dishonest to the core.

One of the great tragedies in recounting the Nanking event is the issue of females being "taken away" as witness Lewis Smythe expressed it so delicately in 1938. The "comfort women" controversy of the 1990s, triggered by current feminist discourse, raised the issue of sexual slavery and sexual assault, but little about the history that led to it. The fact that the Japanese command never planned for the sexual needs of its occupying troops was one catalyst that led to widespread rape (Wakabayashi, 2007). Subsequently, Japan attached (mainly Korean) "comfort women" to its troops to prevent a similar catastrophe from recurring. As well, such ravages were meant to humiliate the conquered populations. Today these surviving Korean females wait for a full public apology. Years later, Japanese servicemen's 'souvenir photographs' of the female despoliations served to demonstrate how powerful a photograph can be in terms of its ability to enrage civilized consciousness, no matter what the citizenship of the beholder is, and to remind one that suppression of the transgression of wartime rape is too often ignored in consideration of public propriety. Today the photograph below of this shamefully humiliated victim stands in a prominent place in the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall (Figure 15).

One is reminded of John Taylor's reference to how images of horror function cognitively as a peculiar blend of fear and disgust. They are both an affront and threat that people may share. Citing John Keane, he reminds us of how exposure to horror functions to keep memories alive, to heighten awareness of current cruelties, to raise issues about whether violence is justified, and to en-

courage remedies for savagery. At the same time one never knows if viewers respond to pictures and film with curiosity, esthetic distance or emotional involvement. What we have demonstrated in this research is that preserved images become part of historical memory (Taylor, 1998; Devereaux & Hillman, 1995; Keane, 1996).

LIFE and *LOOK*'s publication of atrocious photographs posed the question of what standard was used to decide what was proper to see. It is clear that a regular diet of such images would have provoked reactions of disgust, hence the media themselves determined taste and tone. This study has documented their chronology and contribution to historical public discourse. Once war came, the moving images of Nanking served to remind the public that the enemy's acts had been hateful and that common action would lead to Japan's defeat. Republishing these images in 2014 is meant to waken the public from moral slumber, indifference and historical amnesia and to remind present and future perpetrators around the world that there must be a reckoning for their crimes against humanity.

Why did China let Nanking slip from postwar public scrutiny? A faltering Nationalist China ignored the atrocity in exchange for Japanese political support in the late 1940s; after the Communists formed China's government in 1949, their own political expediency demanded that the shame be ignored. Since the 1990s, circulation of Nanking atrocity photographs has revitalized the event's iconic status. This relates to the emergence of a confident China, where nationalists at home and abroad demand historical justice, as well as to surviving Korean "comfort women" who claim the same. Japan's revisionists refuse to face history squarely because this would require that nation to relinquish its postwar status as victim. Contemporary conservative guardians continue to ignore the Nanking atrocity in Japan's history books. Japanese denial of scope and depth aside, the Nanking outrage serves a positive propaganda function of reminding governments that they are answerable for the acts of their soldiers. New generations of soldiers and civilian collaborators need to know that if they are told to obey and to ignore their conscience, they must, in the long run, answer in the court of posterity.

The absence of official postwar Japanese regret or willingness to pay reparations can be explained by Cold War politics that made it easier for public memory to lapse (Chang, 2000; Yoshida, 2000). Iris Chang concluded that Japan's refusal to accept responsibility for the victims of Nanking was a reflection of human nature: she thought unspeakable acts become banalities if they occur far enough away to pose no personal threat. That is one sad conclusion to draw about the Japanese war in Asia. American postwar interest in Japan had more to do with establishing a constitution and democracy than with accounting for Japanese brutality in China. As historians, some perpetrators, and many in the public now demand an explanation for this historical crime, one re-

calls Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel's sober words "Whoever hears a witness to the Holocaust becomes a witness and messenger too" (Bonisteel, 1973). The unleashing of the Japanese soldiers on Nanking should not be allowed to stand as only another sad statistic of human misery. We believe the images referred to in this study impose rather than create a space for meanings (Hardt & Brennan, 1999) and serve a double purpose: they monumentalize shame until Japan accepts its moral responsibility, after which proper mourning and the integration of the collective memory of both Japan and China will be satisfied. Second, they may also serve to help Japan adopt the politics of atonement officially. If this results in some lingering private resentment, at the very least, it will at last force a fair and ongoing public dialogue between Asia's two Great Powers.



Figure 15. The humiliation of sexually ravaged women. Source: Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall.

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About the Author



Gary Evans

Gary Evans is an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Ottawa. In addition to his landmark books on Canadian film published by the University of Toronto Press, he wrote a prize winning monograph on John Grierson and has contributed chapters to books on Canadian film and communications. Gary Evans has also served as a consultant on documentary films for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board of Canada.