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Honda Katsuichi. *The Nanjing Massacre: A Japanese Journalist Confronts Japan's National Shame.* Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1999. xxvii + 367 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7656-0335-7; $90.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7656-0334-0.

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Since the early 1970s Honda Katsuichi has devoted a good part of his professional life to recounting the brutality of the Imperial Japanese Army in China, particularly the Nanjing Massacre. Honda's first book on the subject, *Chugoku no tabi*, (1972) originally appeared in Japan in serialized form in the Asahi shimbun during 1971.[1] The section on the Nanjing massacre created a sensation surfacing as it did at a time of Japanese-Chinese rapproachment exemplified by Prime Minister Tanaka Kakukei's impending to visit Beijing. Honda's next book on the atrocities, *Nankin e no michi*, (1987) more specifically focused on the 1937 Central China campaign culminating in the slaughter at Nanjing.[2] Although at that time still a work in progress, Honda published the book to weigh in on the textbook controversy of the early 1980s which, among other things, had sparked a high profile dispute created between Japanese revisionists and conservatives over the "truth" of the Nanjing Massacre.

When originally published, Honda's polemics were topical to contemporaneous political, social, and educational debates in Japan. There was an immediacy and intensity to the gruesome depictions of the murderous and rapacious conduct of the Japanese army in China that made them fresh and powerful indictments of a military organization gone amok and a society unwilling to confront either that historical fact or its legacy. In other words, timing was everything, and without that special immediacy conferred by the context in which it originally appeared, the overall impact of Honda's indictment is diminished. Honda's works are as much period pieces of reportage as anything else, and reviewing an English language translation of Nankin e no michi ten years after reading the book in the original ranks as an antiquarian experience. The facts are there, but the intensity and emotion are gone. Or are they?

Iris Chang's bestselling *The Rape of Nanjing* has reignited, at least in the American academic community, the issue of Japanese military atrocities committed in China, and general readers familiar with Chang's book may find Honda's accounts just more of the same.[3] This would be unfortunate.

Honda tells his English language readers that his purpose in approving the translation of his work is to stir Americans to exert *gaiatsu* (outside pressure), that mysterious external force that somehow compels Japanese bureaucrats to mend their ways, and in this case make the government acknowledge its horrific past, or as Honda puts it; "bring about change in the disgraceful anti-internationalist behavior of the Japanese government and the conservative forces." (xxvii) This statement implies either that his own efforts in Japan have proven unsuccessful in this regard or that his latest book *Nankin Daigyakusatsu* (1997) in conjunction with gaiatsu will change opinions.[4]

Now, available for a wider English-reading audience, Honda's work is, after its own fashion, a far more compelling indictment of the imperial army than Iris Chang's bestseller. Honda spares few feelings. He is as critical of the official histories of the campaign for concealing by omission facts unfavorable to the imperial army as he is of Japanese whose appeals to the world about Hiroshima and Nagasaki gain Japan a reputation for emphasizing Japanese victim hood "without ever reflecting upon our own violent aspect." (139) In its English-language version, *The Nanjing Massacre* combines the translation of *Nankin e no michi* with selected excerpts of *Chugoku no tabi* and *Nankin Daigyakusatsu* plus an introductory overview written by Frank Gibney and an afterword prepared by Japanese historian Fujiwara Akira. Before discussing *The Nanjing Massacre*, however, it is worth noting that Honda's exposure of Japanese atrocities in China had precedent.

Kanki Haruo's edition of *Sanko, Nihonjin no Chugoku ni okeru senso hanzai no kokuhaku* (1957), drew on confessions made by Japanese soldiers in the early 1950s while awaiting repatriation to the Chinese Communists.[5] Protests by Japanese veteran's groups, an attack on the editor, and accusations that the accounts were trumped

up communist propaganda enabled many Japanese to dismiss the book as mere sensationalism. More to the point, the several accounts drawn from the confessions were unrelated to one another and indeed were heavily laced with then current Chinese Communist propaganda themes, making it possible for apologists to claim the former soldiers merely mouthed the script their captors prepared for them. A more systematic effort specifically recounting the Nanjing Massacre was Waseda University Professor Hora Tomio's 1967 article "Nankin jiken," the first of several articles and books on the massacre that Hora published over the next two decades.[6] Hora drew heavily on testimony and exhibits of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East to craft his tale of horror at Nanjing.[7]

Honda's lasting contribution to the historiography of the Nanjing massacre derives from his path breaking interviews with Chinese victims of the Japanese army's brutality. Their testimony, recorded and published by Honda, makes plain the scope of the atrocities far exceeded the confines of Nanjing. Murder, rape, and pillage began weeks earlier when Japanese forces landed at Hangzhou Bay and continued remorselessly during the Japanese forces drive upriver the Yangtzu River toward the Chinese capital. What happened at Nanjing in December 1937 was neither the start point nor the end point of Japanese brutality in China. Honda concludes that to speak only of five days at Nanjing is meaningless, and the three month period from November 1937 to January 1938 must be considered as a single phenomenon. (134, 285) One might add that during the next seven years in China, especially in the notorious "mopping up" campaigns conducted in north China, the Japanese field army's conduct was a running tale of atrocity.

Honda's methodology relies on heavily on the journalistic device of juxtaposition. He quotes at length, for instance, from contemporary Japanese newspaper accounts of military operations in China, replete with the "patriotic gore" so characteristic of the period, and supplements those journalistic accounts with the versions of operations in the published official military history of the campaign.[8] Contrasting wartime propaganda and the impersonal rendering of the official history with the oral testimony of Chinese victims of the brutal war machine highlights all the more the discrepancy over "historical truth" between the oppressor and the oppressed. Where available, Honda also provides Japanese soldiers' first person accounts, including excerpts of the diary of 16th Division Commander General Nakajima Kesago [9], of the field army's brutality "for the sake of those Japanese who believe the strictly disciplined imperial army would never act like that." (119) The narrative is liberally illustrated with facsimiles of contemporary Japanese newspaper accounts of the fighting, maps, schematic drawings, and photos of the sites of various massacres or rapes or both, and photographs those of aging Chinese peasants whose straightforward testimonies of personal suffering are the heart and soul of Honda's work.

The reader is entitled to ask why the Japanese soldiers routinely committed such crimes. Honda does not address that issue preferring to let Japanese veterans of the campaign explain their motivations directly. He implies that social forces of "a forced, undemocratic modernization that dramatically benefited the military,"(27) were at the root of the behavior. More compelling speculations on the soldiers' motivations for systematic murder and rape are offered in Frank Gibney's well drawn introduction and Fujiwara AkiraÕs postscript. Gibney plays off Iris Chang's work as an uncritical account of what happened at Nanjing in order to emphasize to the reader that Honda gets the facts straight.

Given the wide range of translated materials – from transcribed testimony, to prewar accounts such as *Ikite iru heitai*, to official documents or personal diaries – Karen Sandness is to be congratulated on the felicity of her translation.[10] In a curmudgeonly fashion I offer a few minor observations which in no way detract from her superb effort. In several instances, military nomenclature is not as precise as one might expect. For example, should the "small battleships" on page 39 not be "small gunboats?" Asagumo, not Chuon shimbunsha (17) publishes the Defense Agency's official history series, and Shirai Katsumi is surely the historian Usui Katsumi (284). Better editing should also have eliminated the maddening repetition of the awkward construction "who was xx years old by traditional Chinese reckoning," which carries literal translation too far. These are minor cavils. Sandness' excellent translation has made available to a much wider audience one aspect of Japan's attempts to come to terms with its disgraceful conduct in China and should effectively put to rest fatuous assertions that Nanjing remains a taboo topic. The debate over the Nanjing Incident in Japan may not have been resolved in a politically correct manner, but as Honda's work shows it has been and continues to be an emotional issue that prompts outrage, reflection, and perhaps someday closure.

Notes

[1]. Honda Katsuichi, *Chugoku no tabi*, (Travels in China) Tokyo: Asahi shimbunsha, 1972.

[2]. Honda Katsuichi, *Nankin e no michi*, (The road to Nanjing) Tokyo: Asahi shimbunsha, 1987.

[3]. Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.

[4]. Honda Katsuichi, *Nankin daigyakusatsu*, (The great Nanjing massacre) Tokyo: Asahi shimbunsha, 1997.

[5]. Kanki Haruo, ed., *Sanko, Nihonjin no Chugoku ni oekru senso hanzai no kokuhaku*, (The three all: Japanese confessions of war crimes in China) Tokyo: Kobunsha kappa, 1957.

[6]. Hora Tomio, "Nankin jiken," (The Nanjing incident) in *Kindai senshi no nazo*, (Mysteries of modern war history) Tokyo: Jimbutsu oraisha, 1967.

[7]. Hora Tomio, *Ketteiban: Nankin daigyakysatsu*, (Authoritative edition: The great Nanjing massacre) Tokyo: Tokuma shoten 1982.

[8]. Boeicho Boei senshishitsu, ed., *Senshi sosho, Shina jiken Rikugun sakusen (1) Showa 13 nen 1 gatsu made*, (Official military history: The China incident: Army operations to January 1938) Tokyo: Asagumo shimbunsha, 1975.

[9]. *Nankin koryakusen 'Nakajima dai 16 shidancho nikki,'* (The capture of Nanjing in the diary of 16th division commander Nakajima) Zokan: Rekishi to jimbutsu, Hishi Taiheiyo senso, December 1984.

[10]. Ishikawa Tatsuzo, *Ikite iru heitai*, (Living soldiers) Tokyo: Shincho bunko, 1973 edition.

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