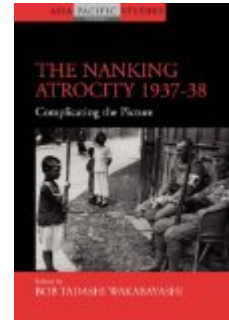




**Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, ed..** *The Nanking Atrocity, 1937-38: Complicating the Picture*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2007. xx + 433 pp. \$39.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-84545-500-2.



**Reviewed by** Sven Saaler

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**Commissioned by** Elisa G. von Joeden-Forgey (University of Pennsylvania)

A number of historical issues continue to cast a shadow over Japan's relations with its Asian neighbors. Territorial issues between Japan on the one side and South Korea, Russia and China on the other remain unresolved. Visits of high-ranking politicians to the Yasukuni Shrine are considered deeply offensive abroad, because the shrine not only venerates 2.5 million ordinary soldiers who gave their lives during the war, but also a number of war criminals, who were sentenced to death at the 1947-48 "Tokyo Trials," a verdict the Japanese government officially recognized in Article 11 of the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty. Japanese denial of atrocities such as the Nanjing (Nanking) massacre of 1937/38 as well as the glorification of war and colonial rule in ultraconservative circles in Japan also continue to strain relations with China and the two Koreas.

While most historians would probably consider their work as ideally leading to "closure"--i.e., to the creation of a generally accepted picture of a given historical event--this does not seem to be possible with a number of these controversies,

despite widespread agreement that they are important "historical issues" (see, for example, the section "Historical Issues" on the homepage of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs).[1] The "Nanjing Massacre" or "Nanjing Incident" of 1937/38 is a case in point.[2] From an outside perspective, it is difficult to imagine how so large a gap could develop between historians on one side of the spectrum, who argue that the victims of this "incident" did not exceed a dozen or so (and thus a "massacre" never happened), and, on the other side, a number of Japanese and most Chinese historians (as well as the official version of the Chinese state) who insist that the figure was as high as 200,000 or even 300,000. Despite decades of work, historians have not only completely failed to close the numbers gap but have, rather, contributed to its widening. As the subtitle of the volume under review suggests, the picture is becoming more complicated not only as the outcome of increasing academic research, but also as a result of activities promoted by a variety of organizations and interest groups in recent years.

Before tackling the book under review, it therefore seems important to point out that the “battle” for the right to interpret the Nanjing question—and other related historical issues—has, to a large degree, slipped out of the hands of historians, as a variety of people and organizations outside the academy have become more involved in investigating the issue, spreading information about Nanjing, stimulating discussion, and contributing to historical interpretations and the settlement of historical grievances. These actors include politicians, lawyers and judges (in lawsuits brought by Nanjing victims mainly against the Japanese state, but also as participants in academic symposia), journalists, and filmmakers. An astonishingly large number of “historical” movies dealing with the Nanjing incident have been produced in the last few years, triggered by the seventieth anniversary of that event. As the cultural historian Aleida Assmann has pointed out, historical movies influence popular historical consciousness and the historical perceptions of the general public far more than any amount of academic research.[3] On the other hand, it is not difficult to spot the academic (and political) positions being staked out in the recent wave of Nanjing movies. The quasi-official Chinese view of a large massacre with several hundred thousand victims is clearly represented in the recent Chinese movie “Nanjing! Nanjing!” (the official English title is “City of Life and Death”).[4] At the other extreme, the (yet to be finished) trilogy “Nanjing no shinjitsu” (The Truth of Nanjing) represents the conservative Japanese (or “revisionist”) view of a more-or-less peaceful occupation of Nanjing in December 1938 and the absence of any massacre.[5] It was produced by the clearly revisionist “Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact.”[6] The German-Chinese-French co-production “John Rabe”, [7] directed by Florian Gallenberger, [8] which focuses on the German businessman John Rabe and his role in establishing the Nanjing Safety Zone (NSZ), seems to be an expression, above all, of the German desire to find more “good Ger-

mans” in recent history --more “Schindlers”--and is thus focused on the large number of victims and Rabe’s role in saving, as the film’s press guide claims, “250,000 Chinese lives.”[9] The movie won a number of awards in Germany but was ignored in Japan when it was released (in Germany and China) in April 2009.[10] All the movies mentioned above were released in 2009, but as early as December 2007, to mark the seventieth anniversary, a half-documentary, half-fictional film called simply “Nanking” had been released.[11] It was produced by Ted Leonis and Bill Guttentag and starred, interestingly, Jürgen Prochnow--the “usual suspect” for the role of the stereotypical German in American movies--as John Rabe.

Against the background of this ongoing interest in the Nanjing issue, the volume under review, published in 2007 to mark the seventieth anniversary of the massacre, is an important addition to our knowledge of the controversy beyond the realms of “historical fiction” and “historical theatrical visualization.” The reviewer shares the editor’s view that the “raw passions” portrayed in film adaptations and other treatments of the Nanjing story stand in the way of reconciliation within East Asia and even constitute an obstacle to a convergence of views on the issue; and that these “passionate” versions of “memory”—although valuable for other purposes—cannot substitute for empirically verified facts in history as an academic discipline” (p. 7).

The book comprises three sections containing sixteen chapters, ten of which were originally written in English, while the remaining six have been translated from the Japanese originals by the editor, Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi. These include one chapter made up of a collection of letters written in Nanjing in 1937 by a reserve officer called up by the Japanese army. The authors of the translated chapters include Kasahara Tokushi and the late Fujiwara Akira, two of the most influential Japanese historians of the Nanjing massacre and adherents of the view that emphasizes

the likelihood of a large number of Chinese casualties, both civilian and military, in Nanjing in 1937/38 (while not supporting the official Chinese claim that this number was as high as 300,000). Some of the other contributors are well known as specialists on the massacre through their numerous publications on the controversy, and include the editor, Yoshida Takashi, David Askew, Timothy Brook, and Joshua A. Fogel. I assume that it was not possible to persuade a representative from the conservative camp of Japanese historians to contribute a chapter.[12] Critics have convincingly undermined the professional credentials of many members of the conservative camp, particularly the deniers of the Nanjing massacre, who have, over the years, engaged in political agitation rather than in rational discussion, so the omission of their writings from this volume will probably not be missed by most readers.

Despite this, the viewpoint contesting the “large massacre theory” and emphasizing the “fact” that the killings were no more than a conventional act of war is also aired in the volume, with some of the contributors showing some acknowledgement of this position. As the editor emphasizes in his introduction, while some awkward facts presented in the book were first established by the *deniers* of a large-scale massacre, they cannot be simply rejected based on political positions and convictions alone--as has so often been the case with “inconvenient” facts in discussions of the Nanjing massacre. Reminding readers of E. H. Carr’s argument in his seminal work of historiography, *What is History?*, the editor urges that “historians must try, at least, to rise above the personal, political, and ethnic biases that virtually all human beings harbor” and strive to arrive at conclusions (and even moral judgments) on a “more reliable, less emotionally distorted basis ” (p. 23).[13] The book seeks to provide the reader with this “more reliable and less emotionally distorted basis” for historical judgment and to refine “the prevailing view of Japanese turpitude, Chinese vic-

timization, and Western humanitarianism at Nanking” (p. 23).

While not all readers would agree with the notion of an apolitical approach to history and the possibility of somehow transcending one’s own social, political and cultural background--not to mention emotions--one has to say that, on the whole, the book should be considered a balanced work that fairly sets out a number of positions and, above all, presents the most recent results of research on what is still a very sensitive issue.

The introduction by editor Wakabayashi, and chapter 2 by Fujiwara Akira, present an overview of the “Nanjing debate” and the three major factions that have developed in response--the “Great Massacre faction,” the “denial faction,” and the “middle ground faction”--as well as the issues at stake. In outlining the debate, they tackle several important questions. How many people were killed in the incident? How many of them were civilians, and how many military personnel and POWs? How many were former military personnel who had taken off their uniforms and, in breach of international law, were fighting the Japanese as “guerillas”--or were simply rounded up as stragglers? Was the massacre of an organized nature or was it just another random act of brutality such as happens constantly in wartime?

Chapter 3 by Kasahara Tokushi traces in detail the “Massacres Outside Nanking City,” claiming that the number of victims within and around the city numbered “well over 100,000 and approaching 200,000” (p. 68)--a figure the editor confirms as highly reliable in his closing chapter (p. 384). Chapter 4 by Ono Kenji analyzes the “Massacres in the Vicinity of Mufushan,” a mountainous region near Nanjing where 17,000 to 18,000 Chinese POWs were executed.

In chapter 5, David Askew scrutinizes the claims for a large massacre, analyzing the population records for Nanjing in December 1937 and the numbers of victims as estimated in contemporary reports by the Australian journalist Harold J.

Timperley, American anthropology professor Lewis S. Smythe, German businessman John Rabe, missionary John Magee (who managed to film abuses of Chinese civilians by Japanese soldiers and later smuggled this footage out of Nanjing), and NSZ administration officials like Miner Bates and John Fitch, another missionary. Although the point is often made in genocide studies that, notwithstanding discussions about the precise numbers of victims, the historical responsibility for an atrocity is not lessened for the perpetrators nor does the event become less traumatic for the victims based on casualty figures, the debate over numbers has been an all-consuming issue in both academic and popular discussions of events in Nanjing in 1937 and 1938. Most of the reports consulted by Askew estimate the total population of Nanjing in late 1937 as being no more than 200,000 to 250,000, fostering doubts about estimates of victims that reach a similar figure. On the other hand, the chaotic state of the war zone clearly made it difficult to conduct any kind of dispassionate investigation. Askew concludes that it seems most likely that accounts that speak of around 40,000 victims, including 12,000 POWs, are more or less correct. In arriving at this figure, he refers to the account of Harold Timperley, who in his first report gave a much higher number, but in later reports and publications refers to a figure of around 40,000 (p. 97ff)--a tally confirmed by the records of the Red Swastika Society (RSS), a Chinese charitable organization which claimed to have buried about 40,000 corpses of "unarmed persons" (p. 98ff). Furthermore, the RSS claimed that almost all the dead were male, and Askew takes a number of writers to task on this point. For example, he charges Edgar Snow with manipulation in his book *The Battle for Asia* (1941) and sees this as "the first in a long history of factual distortions." According to Askew, Snow "inverts Bates' breakdown, claiming that 'a large percentage' of those killed were 'women and children'" (p. 107). Further, Agnes Smedley's estimate in *Battle Hymn of China* (1943) of a death toll of

"200,000 civilians and unarmed soldiers" is "totally unacceptable in that Nanking's entire civilian population at the time was 200,000 to 250,000 at most" (p. 107).

Chapter 6 is a revised version of an article by the editor, originally published in *Monumenta Nipponica* and required reading for anybody dealing with the Nanjing question. The chapter gives an overview of the postwar Nanjing debates in Japan and, in particular, traces the issue of the factuality of the so-called 100-Man Killing Contest Debate (a contest that supposedly involved two Japanese soldiers competing to be the first to kill one hundred enemies with his sword), an issue still hotly debated today between Nanjing deniers and those emphasizing the magnitude of the Nanjing massacre as well as the high degree of brutality during the event. Chapter 7, by Timothy Brook, examines the way in which the Tokyo War Crimes Trials dealt with the Nanjing issue after the war and focuses on the role of Indian judge Radhabindod Pal. Although Pal "did not deny that the incident occurred," he strongly "doubted that the victors had the right to judge" (p. 150), largely as a result of Pal's acceptance of "Japan's slogan of 'Asia for the Asians' and [his view of] the war as just because it was waged 'to liberate Asia from the Europeans'" (p. 167).

Brook's second contribution, on "Chinese Collaboration in Nanking" in section 2, further revises the general picture of Japanese perpetrators and Chinese victims by emphasizing Chinese cooperation with the Japanese occupiers. In his chapter, Brook explores the activities of the RSS, the "Nanking Self-government Committee," and, as an example of individual collaboration, the activities of Jimmy Wang, one of the central figures of that committee. According to Brook, Wang "fits no moral models, and offends many; he saw opportunities where others saw only horror and defeat, and made the most of these; he saved others, and in that process gained something for himself" (p. 222). In chapter 10, David Askew's second

contribution investigates the activities of “Westerners in Occupied Nanking,” while chapter 11 by Takashi Yoshida explores “Wartime Accounts of the Nanking Atrocity.” In this article Yoshida—who has done much to enhance our understanding of the development of postwar attitudes and has been a major contributor to the historiography and memorialization of the Nanjing issue in Japan, China and the United States—sets out to refute claims that a massacre never happened in Nanjing, a position frequently advanced by a number of ultraconservative Japanese scholars, politicians, and agitators.[14] He directly confronts the “deniers” such as the late Tanaka Masaaki, Watanabe Shōichi and Higashinakano Osamichi (Shūdō), who support their views by arguing that the killings were scarcely noted by wartime media and that not even the Kuomintang (KMT) government of Chiang Kai-shek, whose capital was Nanjing until December 1937, made a strong appeal to the League of Nations or to third-party countries. Yoshida convincingly argues that, for the National Government, it was much easier to make general claims of Japanese aggression than to report unspecified numbers of “cruelties” or “atrocities” in Nanjing to the League of Nations: the KMT “stressed [Japanese] poison gas warfare [in cities such as Wuhan] rather than actions in Nanking” (p. 254). The use of poison gas was a severe and clear violation of international law (the Hague Convention) and “Western peoples were especially sensitive to poison gas, perhaps because of their painful experiences in the Great War of 1914-1918—only two decades before” (p. 254). The Chinese government “thought of Nanking as but one of innumerable Japanese atrocities in China at the time.... Although Chinese delegates to the League of Nations did mention Nanking explicitly in protesting Japanese war crimes, they chose to emphasize Japan’s use of chemical weapons and air raids on open cities because these types of atrocities, they reckoned, would more likely win world sympathy and aid” (p. 261).

In section 3 (“Another Denied Holocaust?”), Joshua A. Fogel critiques the interpretation of the Nanjing atrocities as “another Holocaust” (chapter 12). He criticizes Iris Chang’s much-quoted book *The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* for its unqualified use of the terms “holocaust” and “genocide.” Although he points out that the Nanjing massacre was the end result of Japanese racism toward the Chinese and the process of dehumanization of the Chinese by Japanese troops, according to Fogel events in China and Nanjing 1937/38 did not follow the normal patterns of genocide—i.e., we cannot speak of organized mass murder of a minority by a majority, nor can we find what Zygmunt Bauman has identified as a major component of genocide, that is, a purpose, “a grand vision of a better and radically different society” (p. 280). In Nanjing, Fogel claims, “an overarching purpose was missing” (p. 281). A comparison of the Nanjing massacre with the Holocaust or other cases of “ideological” genocide might indeed pose difficulties for many scholars in the field, as the author points out (pp. 277-81). But Fogel also seems to tend to avoid characterizing the Nanjing massacre as a genocide, measured against the definitions of genocide in the United Nations Convention on Genocide (1948) and in the above-mentioned writings of Bauman. He concludes that the Nanjing atrocity “was an instance of impromptu, large-scale, mass murder perpetrated in the context of Japan’s brutal war of aggression.... Thus the Atrocity in some respects resembles other events in Africa, Cambodia, and the New World that have acquired the label ‘genocidal.’ However, it fell far short both in numerical count and percentage of population slain, and it lacked the ideological impetus and bureaucratic efficiency that spurred on many of these other genocides” (p. 281). Fogel’s argument seems aimed at preempting revisionist criticism of inflationary use of terms like “genocide” or “Holocaust,” but it seems to adhere to a somewhat too narrow definition of genocide, one which may not be shared by a large number of scholars.

In chapter 13, Masahiro Yamamoto interprets the “popularity of Chang’s book in America” as a result of “ethnic prejudice [towards Japan] and the wide gap in interpretations of the Atrocity between professional historians and the general public.” He rejects Chang’s claim that the Nanjing atrocity can be described as “another Holocaust” or even as genocide, and calls Chang’s book the product of sensationalism. He argues that it is essential to “*banish the terms Holocaust and genocide from this controversy*” because “the careless use of sensational vocabulary may produce, or has already produced, highly undesirable effects on lay audiences. First, it may intensify prejudice against Japanese.... Second, because other atrocities in history also may improperly be likened to the Jewish Holocaust, its significance cannot but be slighted” (299f, emphasis in the original).

In chapter 14, Kasahara Tokushi scrutinizes the arguments of the Japanese denial faction, the recent movement for historical revisionism, and particularly the notorious Nanjing denier Higashinakano Osamichi.[15] In chapter 15 (“Nanking: Denial and Atonement in Contemporary Japan”), Kimura Takuji critically analyzes the development of historical revisionism in conservative circles and the political activities of this movement, which he contrasts with “left-wing historical scholarship,” which has “spurred the emergence of numerous citizen-led movements ... aimed at educating the general public about imperial Japanese war crimes” (p. 330). Although much in this essay is already mentioned within the book or has appeared elsewhere, it neatly contextualizes the arguments of Nanjing deniers as well as the advocates of a “Great Massacre” (Kasahara and Ono among others) within a scholarly and political framework. The author emphasizes the important point that, notwithstanding the publicity and sensationalism surrounding the ongoing denials of a Nanjing massacre, only “a minority of people in Japan continue to deny this history of aggression, are intent on claiming that the Nanking atrocity was fabricated or grossly

overblown, and repudiate any need for atonement”(p. 352).[16]

In his closing piece, “Leftover Problems” (chapter 16), the editor treats some important issues left unexamined by most of the contributors. First, he summarizes views on the victim tally presented in several contributions, emphasizing that figures “under 40,000 and over 200,000 push the limits of reason, fairness, and evidence” (p. 362). As the most reliable sources for these upper and lower limits, Wakabayashi suggests Kasahara Tokushi as the scholar who has most adequately defined the “contours” of the massacre, producing an estimated victim toll—a toll not limited to the inner city of Nanjing, but including victims of the larger area of the capital zone—approaching 200,000 (p. 362). He also commends the research of historian Hata Ikuhiko for fixing the lower estimate at somewhat over 40,000 victims (Hata considers himself a “middle-of-the road” scholar, although he is often characterized by the media as a “denier”). As his final word on the issue, Wakabayashi concludes that “Japanese troops illegally and unjustifiably massacred *at least* 29, 240 Chinese—and I would say 46,215—just before and after Nanking fell....Largely following Kasahara Tokushi, then, I conclude that a final victim total will far exceed 100,000 but fall short of 200,000.” He expands the time frame of the “Nanjing Massacre” to the period from “early December 1937 to the end of March 1938 in the ... walled city and 6 adjacent counties ”(p. 384). Wakabayashi also cites Japanese discussions of the usefulness of comparing the postwar process of “coming to terms with the past” in Japan with that in Germany. Finally, he emphasizes the basic problem of the lack of primary sources, a situation which, for the historian following the rule of “no evidence, no history,” is a central problem in dealing with the Nanjing issue.

Citing the changing stance of Hata Ikuhiko, from his rejection in 1986 of the view that “there was no ‘massive butchery’” to his role in the “in-

augural meeting of a Nanking denial society," Wakabayashi concludes that "it is time to stop fighting the China war and start understanding it as history without hatred" (p. 389). On the evidence of recent opinion polls indicating that anti-Chinese sentiment in Japan is increasing alarmingly, it hardly needs stating that, even though recent research on the Nanjing massacre has failed to produce groundbreaking new results, for students of modern East Asian history (whether from an East Asian or a Euro-American background), continuing debate on the issue is essential in order to maintain and increase our awareness of this tragic event in world history for as long as it remains a central element of the historical traumatization of East Asia.

## Notes

[1]. <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/postwar/index.html> (last accessed May 10, 2009).

[2]. The Q&A section of MOFA's homepage includes the official position of the Japanese government on the "Nanjing Massacre": [http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/q\\_a/faq16.html#q8](http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/q_a/faq16.html#q8).

[3]. Assmann, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2007), 162-67.

[4]. <http://j.people.com.cn/94478/96695/6642806.html>.

[5]. <http://www.thetruthofnanking.com/English/MainFrame.html>.

[6]. See <http://www.sdh-fact.com/>.

[7]. See the official Web site [www.johnrabe.de](http://www.johnrabe.de).

[8]. Gallenberger was the winner of the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film in 2000 for *Quiero ser (I want to be...)*.

[9]. [http://www.johnrabe.de/downloads/johnrabe\\_presseheft.pdf](http://www.johnrabe.de/downloads/johnrabe_presseheft.pdf).

[10]. The movie won four German Film Awards, including Best Film, Best Director, and Best Actor. Ulrich Tukur also won the 2009 Bavarian Film Awards for Best Actor.

[11]. See <http://www.nankingthefilm.com/home.html>.

[12]. The conservative camp, particularly the "denial faction" that denies that anything approaching a massacre took place in Nanjing in 1937/38, has recently made extensive efforts to publicize their views, not only in Japan but also through English translations of their writings, which are freely accessible on the Internet.

[13]. Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 163.

[14]. Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the "Rape of Nanking": History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); "For the Nation or For the People?: History and Memory of the Nanjing Massacre in Japan," in *The Power of Memory in Modern Japan*, ed. Sven Saaler and Wolfgang Schwenker (Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2008), 17-31; "Refighting the Nanking Massacre: The Continuing Struggle over Memory," in *Nanking 1937: Memory and Healing*, ed. Robert Sabell (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2002), 154-80; "A Battle over History: The Nanjing Massacre in Japan," in *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography*, ed. Joshua Fogel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 70-132; "The Nanjing Massacre: Changing Contours of History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States," Web site, *Japan Focus* (<http://www.japanfocus.org/>), posted December 2006.

[15]. For this movement, see Sven Saaler, *Politics, Memory and Public Opinion: The History Textbook Controversy and Japanese Society* (Munich: Iudicium, 2005).

[16]. The present reviewer reaches almost identical conclusions in his *Politics, Memory and Public Opinion*.

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