
2c. The Nanking Massacre, Justice and Reconciliation: A Chinese Perspective

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Introduction

Six decades after the conclusion of World War II, China and Japan, Asia's two great powers, remain estranged from each other politically even as their economic ties are growing at a rapid pace. Unlike France and Germany, China and Japan have not yet achieved a genuine reconciliation after the World War II. Among all the Japanese war atrocities, the Nanking Massacre has been, especially from the Chinese perspective, the most salient and emotionally symbolic in the Sino-Japanese relationship. The Rape of Nanking, or the Nanking Massacre, refers to the atrocities committed by Japanese troops against Chinese soldiers and civilians during and after the attack on Nanking, the then capital of China. Although more than sixty years have passed since the Nanking Massacre, the memory and interpretations of this history have had an enduring effect on Sino-Japanese relations. As Kirby (1997: x) says, "Sixty years later, the ghosts of Nanking still haunt Chinese-Japanese relations."

In this paper, I critically analyze the reconciliation efforts that have been made with respect to the Nanking Massacre. In the first section, I briefly present some general facts on the Nanking Massacre and its reconciliation process. In the second section, based on the critical review of some policy debates on Sino-Japanese relations, I describe the central problem of the reconciliation process over the Nanking Massacre: that the individual rights and voices of victims and survivors have gone largely missing in the reconciliation process. Instead of avoiding this historical issue, both China and Japan should face up to the history and actively look for alternative solutions to deal with the past. In the third section, I set forth an analytical framework, based on the analysis of the literature on transitional justice as well as the literature on international relations, with the aim of both evaluating different reconciliation measures and finding the major factors that contribute to their results. In doing so, I set the goals of truth, justice and peace as the general criteria to categorize and evaluate the measures. Also, I take the political power structure in the interactions of "two-level games" (Putnam 1988) as the major explanatory variable for the reconciliation results. In the fourth section, I apply the analytical framework to the reconciliation process. In the fifth section, I discuss some possible alternatives to improve the reconciliation measures under the changing context of the power structures in both China's domestic politics and Sino-Japanese relations. In the conclusion, I draw some general lessons we can learn from the case of the Nanking Massacre.

The Nanking Massacre and Sino-Japanese Reconciliation

In December 1937, the Japanese army launched a massive attack on the Chinese capital of Nanking. After the city fell on December 13, the Japanese military forces committed mass murder as well as large scale raping and looting. An estimated 300,000 Chinese soldiers and civilians were killed, and 20,000 women were raped. The time frame of the incident is generally understood to be at least six-weeks following December 13, and the geographical scope of the Massacre coincided with the areas under the jurisdiction of Nanking Special Municipality, including the city districts of Nanking and its suburban counties. There is still a debate on the exact time frame, geographical scope, and death toll of the Nanking Massacre. The source here is an inter-subjective conclusion of most scholars in China and the international scholarly community (Sun 2002, Lee 2002, and Tokushi 2002).

After the establishment of the “*weixin zhengfu*” (the collaborating government) in 1938, order was gradually restored in Nanking and atrocities by Japanese troops lessened considerably. In September of 1945, the Japanese government surrendered to the Chinese government and the Sino-Japanese War ended. However, during the past six decades, very few reconciliation measures have been successfully used in the case of the “Rape of Nanking.” Shortly after the surrender of Japan, some primary offenders were sentenced to death by the Nanking War Crimes Trial and the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, including Tani Hisao (the lieutenant general of the 6th Division of the Japanese army in Nanking) and General Iwane Matsu (the Japanese commanding general in Nanking). However, many military leaders who were guilty of the Nanking Massacre were not tried and the Chinese people have often felt that the 1945 War Crimes trials did not satisfy their hopes for justice. In 1972, the Chinese government renounced its demand for war reparations from Japan in a joint statement between China and Japan. However, many individual victims have never forgiven the war crimes of the Japanese army. Some Chinese victims have brought lawsuits seeking compensation, but the Japanese government refuses to pay any compensation, based on the 1972 Joint Statement. In recent years, several Japanese Prime Ministers have offered informal oral apologies (“remorse”), but many Chinese people and the government request a formal and official apology.

Major Problems with the Reconciliation Process

The memory of the Nanking Massacre has had an enduring effect on the Sino-Japanese relations. Japan has now become China’s most important trading partner and the bilateral exchanges on trade, culture and education have improved greatly since the two countries normalized their bilateral relations (Yuan 2004). Nevertheless, many Chinese people still have a strong sense of mistrust and animosity toward Japan. This mistrust originates from the memory of Japanese wartime atrocities such as the Nanking Massacre and is strengthened by the failure of peacetime reconciliation measures.

How should China and Japan deal with past atrocities and build future-oriented relations? There are different points of view in China and abroad. Some scholars propose that China should have a “new thinking” by putting the historical issues aside in order to build a better Sino-Japanese relationship (Ma 2002 and Shi 2003). Their opinions unleashed a wide-ranging debate and intense criticism in China and abroad. Zhang (2003) criticizes the “new thinking” view and argues that Chinese people have the right to seek justice for Japanese war atrocities. Japanese media and foreign policy circles typically express the view that anti-Japanese sentiment in China is largely due to “patriotic education” and mass mobilization by the Chinese government (The Yomiuri Shimbun 2005; Yusaku Yamane 2005). My view is that the wounds caused by Japanese war crimes are still deeply felt in Chinese society, and that this results partly from the fact that the voices and human rights of individual victims have been largely missing in the reconciliation process between China and Japan. This might be one of the reasons that the hatred or mistrust of Chinese people toward Japan has been rising and more obvious in recent years. The “new thinking” argument amounts to a mere weighing of national interests in the balance of power in international politics, with little or no regard for the individual rights and voices of the individual victims of Japanese war crimes. It is also inaccurate and biased for some Japanese commentators to attribute anti-Japanese sentiment solely to mass mobilization by the Chinese government (Gries 2004). National identity and emotions are involved in Chinese popular nationalism, and in politics, emotion is not necessarily the enemy of rationality (Mercer 2005:92-99, Gries 2004).

In order to improve Chinese-Japanese relations and build real future-oriented relations, both China and Japan can not simply avoid the historical problems and hope they go away. Instead,

both China and Japan should face up to history and look for alternative solutions to deal with these ongoing problems.

Analytical Framework: Three Goals and the Power Structure in “Two-Level Games”

In this article, I apply an analytical framework to critically review the reconciliation process between China and Japan with respect to the Nanking Massacre. The idea of the analytical framework mainly comes from the literature on transitional justice, and it also adopts some ideas from the literature on international relations theories. In the literature on transitional justice, several scholars have discussed the tensions or conflicts between competing values and goals. Rigby (2001:12) argues that “when dealing with a legacy of human rights violations, there is an ongoing tension between the need for truth, the quest for justice, and the desire for peace.” As for the factors that lead to the different paths of transition, Rigby focuses on the distribution of political power in transitional societies. In his case studies, we can see that the degree to which the goals of truth and justice can be fulfilled by the successor regimes will mainly depend on how powerfully advantaged the new regimes are against the perpetrators from the old regimes. The finding from Rigby can even be generalized into a wider context. That is, the distribution of power or the power structure in place after a conflict will largely determine the general directions and results of the reconciliation process, not only in domestic transitional societies but also in international relations. In the case of the Nanking Massacre, the influence of the power structure on the reconciliation process takes place in the complex interactions of domestic politics and international relations instead of in a single domestic context. Putnam (1988) pioneered the development of the concept of “two-level games” to conceptualize the interactions of domestic politics and international relations.

At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies, and the politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign development. (434)

Putnam’s “two-level game” model was originally discussed in the context of western democratic regimes. Although China is different from western democracy, public opinion and social pressures have played an increasing role in influencing Chinese foreign policy (Fewsmith and Rosen 2001). Here the concept of “two-level game” is largely used as a metaphor to describe the dynamic interaction of domestic politics and Sino-Japanese relations.¹

In the case of the Nanking Massacre, truth, justice and peace can be regarded as the three major goals of the reconciliation process. I therefore set these three goals as the main criteria to categorize and evaluate those reconciliation measures. Truth investigations, history and historiography all fall within the category of truth-seeking reconciliation measures. Trials, reparations and apologies are justice-seeking reconciliation measures. “Peace and friendship treaties”, peace education, memorials and commemorations are peace-seeking reconciliation measures. My categorization is of course just a part of the analytical framework and does not absolutely exclude any of the reconciliation measures from any category. The reconciliation measures that have been used in the Nanking case have been far from sufficient and successful, which is in contrast to the reconciliation process with respect to the Holocaust. The power

¹A similar case of using the concept of “two-level game” in a different context can be found in Richard C. Bush’ study of the Taiwan issue, in which he refers the cross strait relations as a “two-level game”. See: *Untying the Knot: Making Peace in the Taiwan Strait*. Richard Bush, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press 2005), pp. 282-286.

structure of the post-conflict relations explains the major part of the failure of the reconciliation process. (This does not mean, however, that the power structure is the only explanatory variable.)

Evaluation and Analysis of the Reconciliation Measures

Truth-Seeking Reconciliation Measures

To find and record truth can provide a basic foundation to pursue other goals in the reconciliation process. The major truth-seeking reconciliation efforts with respect to the Nanking Massacre included the following: first, in preparation for the Tokyo Trial and the Nanking Trial, both the Allied Powers and the Chinese Nationalist government at Nanking made thorough and extensive investigations of the Nanking Massacre (Lee 2002:51-53). The main purpose of trials is to pursue justice by punishing perpetrators according to legal standards, but trials can also play a limited role in creating credible documents and establishing a historical record (Minow 1998:50, Hayner 2001: 100-102). The Tokyo Trials had verified many types of evidence and concluded that 20,000 Chinese had died in the Nanking Massacre. The general conclusion of the Nanking Trials was that there were more than 300,000 victims (Eykholt 2000:18-24). The conclusions in these trials became a foundation of official interpretation on the Nanking Massacre, although there were still some debates about the limitations of these trials. Second, the Nationalist government's National Relief and Rehabilitation Agency also made separate and independent examinations. The findings of this governmental agency added some additional evidence of death toll to the historical record (Lee 2002: 53). Third, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the government also supported several large-scale historical investigations of the Nanking Massacre. One of the most important efforts was that in the 1980s, the Nanking city government organized *The Compilation Committee on Documents Relating to the Nanking Massacre*. The Committee started an oral history project, interviewing and recording the testimonials of all survivors of the Massacre (Lee 2002: 65). In Japan, on the other hand, the view from the Tokyo Trial "has become standard in Japanese school textbooks and among progressive historians" (Yoshida 2000: 71). Yet there are still some conservative Japanese politicians that deny the truth of the Nanking Massacre.

The major problem with the truth-seeking reconciliation measures is that there has been a "politicization of history" (Yang 2000:152). Yang argues that political and moral considerations sometimes become an obstacle preventing Chinese and Japanese from achieving a "shared historical understanding that transcends national boundaries." In the case of the Nanking Massacre, Yang's "politicization of history" argument can also be interpreted from a "two-level game" perspective in domestic politics and Sino-Japanese relations. In Japan's domestic politics, the incomplete power transfer from the perpetrators in the old regime explains why there are always some important politicians refusing the facts of the Nanking Massacre. In Sino-Japanese relations, the unequal power relationship between China and Japan can explain mainly why the facts of Nanking Massacre have received delayed attention in the international community, which is in contrast to the case of the Nazi Holocaust in Europe. [Might want to add something here about how talking about the Nanking Massacre draws attn away from current problems in Chinese domestic politics, which might be useful for some Chinese politicians.]

Justice-Seeking Reconciliation Measures

A trial is often the most direct and most prominent measure for people to pursue justice after a conflict. Minow (1998: 26) points out that a trial "should mark an effort between vengeance and forgiveness. It transfers the individuals' desires for revenge to the state or official bodies. " However, both the Nanking Trial and the Tokyo Trial failed to satisfy Chinese hopes for justice.

The Tokyo Trial suffered heavily from “politicization.” First, the Trial was generally dominated by the United States and was taken by some Japanese as the “victors’ justice” (Yasuaki 2002:208). Second, the weak status of China at that time in international politics meant that “China was never the focus of the Trial” (Eykholt 2000:19). Among 250 high Japanese officials in custody, only 28 were charged. In the end the Trial sentenced seven of the defendants to death, two of whom were described as directly responsible for the Nanking Massacre: General Matsui Iwane and former foreign minister Hirota Koki. When the Cold War began, the United States considered making Japan a bulwark against Communism in Asia. In this situation, General MacArthur released the remaining seventeen men waiting for trial (Eykholt 2000: 21). In China, the Nationalist Chinese government organized the Nanking War Crimes Trial to prosecute class B and C war criminals from 1946 to 1947. Chinese sentences were severe but received little notice in the context of the civil war in China (Chang 1997: 170-172, Eykholt 2000:19-21). The Tokyo Trial not only failed to satisfy Chinese people’s hopes for justice, but also did not transform the Japanese government completely from the old regime. Many perpetrators of war crimes later continued playing important roles in Japan’s political and business circles. The failure of complete power transfer is an important cause of why the Japanese government and politicians have been unwilling to apologize and face up to the historical issues (Li 2003:59-67).

For the victims and their family members or the Chinese people in general, an urgent need in the reconciliation process is an official, formal and sincere apology from the Japanese government. Tavuchis (1991:45) points out that apology is “a decisive moment in a complex restorative project arising from an unaccountable infraction and culminating in remorse and reconciliation.” For the victims, an apology can help to restore their human dignity and lessen their suffering and shame. For Japan, an apology can reintegrate Japan into a “designated moral community” (Tavuchis: 7), and help Japan regain the trust, respect and dignity in the international community. Since the normalization of Chinese-Japanese relations, Japanese top leaders have expressed their “reflection”, “remorse” and “apology” several times. For instance, on the 50th anniversary of Japan's surrender in WWII, Prime Minister Murayama delivered an apology for the wartime atrocities Japan caused during its invasion of Asia. “I . . . express here once again my feelings of deep remorse and state my heartfelt apology”(Murayama 1995). In the 1998 China-Japan Summit meeting, Japanese prime minister Obuchi expressed his deep “remorse” for “the serious distress and damage that Japan caused to the Chinese people,” but he did not give an official and written “heartfelt apology” (Green 2001:98). In 2001, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi expressed his “heartfelt apology and condolences” to the Chinese people when he visited China (*People’s Daily* 2001).

The problem is that most Chinese people remain doubtful of the sincerity of the apology made by the Japanese top leaders. First, the Chinese people and the government want an official, formal and written apology, which will be regarded as being very sincere by the Chinese, instead of an oral and informal apology. Second, certain actions of Japanese politicians have become symbolically sensitive for the Chinese people because of the memory and perception of the Japanese war crimes in China. For instance, while Prime Minister Koizumi released his apology to the Chinese people in 2001, he has also visited Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine at least four times in last three years. The Yasukuni Shrine honors about 2.5 million Japanese war dead, including some Class-A war criminals of World War II (Yuan 2004). While the Japanese people might see their Prime Minister’s visit of the Yasukuni Shrine as a reasonable action to pay their respect to war dead, the Chinese government and people usually interpret such an event as a symbol of a possible revival of Japanese militarism.

Compensation and reparation are also important for the victims, not only psychologically reducing their suffering but also helping them to live a better life (Hayner 2002:170-171).

According to the interviews by Chang (1997:183), many survivors of the Nanking Massacre live in poverty because of physical injuries and other causes. The Chinese government renounced the right to request reparation in the 1972 Joint Statement. But individual victims have not given up their rights. Several individual victims sued the Japanese government for an apology and compensation in the 1990s. However, on Sept 22, 1999, the Tokyo District Court judged that “individuals do not have the right to sue the Japanese government” (Johnson 2000). The Japanese government continues refusing to pay reparations to the individual victims in China. On the other hand, the Japanese government has provided a huge amount of Official Development Aid (ODA) to China, most in the form of low interest yen loan packages. “By the 1990s, these yen loan packages accounted for half of China’s total economic assistance from abroad.” (Green 2001:80). Although Japan’s ODA to China has several comprehensive political and economic purposes, the yen loan can also be regarded as a special way Japan compensates China. The problem of compensation and reparation is that there is no attention or less focus on the individual needs of those victims and survivors. Although China benefits from Japan’s ODA, this does not help much in curing the wounds in the victims and fails to reduce the hatred of the Chinese people toward Japan.

Peace-Seeking Reconciliation Measures

China has signed three important documents with Japan, which aim to build a solid foundation for peace and friendship between the two countries. The three documents are: the Joint Communique of the Government of Japan and the Government of the People's Republic of China (1972), the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and the People's Republic of China (1978), and the Japan-China Joint Declaration (1998).

Both in China and Japan, there are also many memorials and commemorations concerning the Nanking Massacre. In China, the government built the Victims of Nanking Massacre Memorial Museum in Nanking. The museum not only keeps many historical documents on the Nanking Massacre, it is also a base for people from China and abroad to commemorate the victims and learn something from history. Memorials play an important role in reconciliation process. “Memorials can name those who were killed; they can depict those who resisted and those who rescued. They can accord honor and confer heroic status; they can express shame, remorse, warning, and shock” (Minow 1998:138).

Peace education on the atrocities and mass violence is also an integral part of a peace effort after a conflict (Minow 1998:144). Peace education should not only teach historical facts of the atrocities to young people, but also help them think critically and independently about some humanistic values of justice, forgiveness, and empathy (Minow 1998:144). In the case of the Nanking Massacre, peace education has been far from sufficient and successful. On the Japanese side, the contents of textbooks are often distorted and censored by certain conservative politicians. On the Chinese side, although Chinese media and officials often criticize the shortcomings of history education in Japan, there are also some possible shortcomings of China’s history education with respect to Japanese war crimes and the Nanking Massacre in particular. Generally the textbooks in China have a clear and detailed narration of the Nanking Massacre, but the Chinese textbooks and education regarding the Nanking Massacre seem to put a priority on patriotism and nationalism. The contents of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace are almost completely absent. This might be one of the reasons that nationalism and hostility toward Japan are becoming fiercer among Chinese young generations in recent years.

The Changing Context and Some Possible Alternatives

Before looking at alternatives to the current reconciliation measures, we should note that there are two trends which are changing the context of the reconciliation process between China and Japan. The first is the rise of China's power status in international relations. Since China initiated its opening and reform policy in the late 1970s, China's political, economic and military power has been growing so consistently and quickly that some commentators have started to worry about the so-called "China threat" in recent years. This trend is changing the power relationship between China and Japan. The second trend is China's vast domestic transition from a planned economy and authoritarian regime to a more market-oriented and open society, which leads to the rise of civil society and pluralist voices. Public opinion has become a more important factor which the top leaders must consider in the foreign policy decision-making toward Japan (Fewsmith and Rosen 2001). The two trends have had some general positive effects on the reconciliation process. That is, the changing power relationships can provide the individual victims and the victimized country a stronger leverage to pursue truth and justice. The changing power relationships might help explain why China is now generally more demanding with respect to the historical issues than several decades ago. However, the two trends might also have negative effects on the reconciliation process. Using Putnam's two-level model perspective, at the international level, China's rising power status leads to a difficult problem of how two great powers that still have a deep mistrust originating from historical issues can peacefully coexist in East Asia. At the domestic level, nationalist opinions in both China and Japan have led to a vicious cycle of interactions between the two peoples, with extremists using each others' statements as fuel to add to the fire.

To put the current reconciliation measures into the changing context, several alternatives might improve the reconciliation process.

First, with respect to truth-seeking reconciliation measures, China now has more resources, energy and freedom to investigate and fully research historical issues. Chinese scholars and officials should have more confidence to carry on dialogue with their Japanese counterparts over the facts and interpretations of the Nanking Massacre. Some Japanese politicians and scholars have repeatedly called for setting up a joint Chinese-Japanese committee to investigate the Nanking Massacre (Yang 2000:170). China can consider accepting such a suggestion. As Rigby (2001:190) points out, "the different parties to a conflict each have their own history, and people do not relinquish their collective memory easily," but "to ensure that rival narratives do not fuel future conflicts, it is vital that people learn to acknowledge the validity of other people's truths." Second, with respect to justice-seeking reconciliation measures, since the trials occurred many years ago, apologies and reparations are the measures that can be improved going forward. Generally speaking, there should be more emphasis on the specific needs of individual victims and their family members. With respect to apologies, there are some political and cultural barriers that lead to the current unsatisfying result. Both the Chinese and the Japanese should take into account these barriers and try to minimize the negative effects of these barriers. On the Japanese side, the top leadership of Japan should be more sensitive to the feelings of the Chinese people when they deal with historical issues concerning Japanese-Chinese relations. On the Chinese side, the Chinese government and public media can tell the Chinese people a more nuanced and complex narration of Japanese politics and culture, which might help reduce cultural misunderstandings and ease the anger and hatred of the Chinese people toward Japan. With respect to reparations, although the Chinese government has renounced its rights to reparation from Japan, the victims can still retain legal and moral rights to their reparations. A possible compromise is that the Chinese government could negotiate with its Japanese counterpart to have some special arrangements for the Official Development Aid, which can transfer some benefits from the ODA directly to the welfare and healing of the victims. Accordingly, the Chinese

government can also consider publicizing more information on ODA to the Chinese people, which might have some positive effects on the healing and forgiveness of the Chinese people.² Third, with respect to peace education, both China and Japan have much to improve. The most urgent problem is: How can China and Japan mute their domestic nationalisms and how can the two great powers coexist peacefully in East Asia? Both the governments and media in the two countries should take the responsibilities to add more contents of peace and reconciliation to the education of young generations. Also, the political elites in the two countries can consider strengthening each country's common identity as an Asian country. As Stein (2001:189) points out, in enduring interstate rivalries "interests are shaped by images that in turn are partially shaped by identity." He also argues that "the identities that shape images are not given but are socially reconstructed." China and Japan had constructed adverse images in history; they have been trying to construct friendly images since the normalization of the bilateral relations. China and Japan, the two most powerful countries in Asia, can choose to construct a common Asian identity, which will bring a lasting peace and cooperation to the two countries and the region, just as the efforts of France and Germany have given birth to the common identity of Europe.

Conclusion

First, although I admit that many factors will influence the reconciliation process, I still see the power structure or power relationships between the perpetrators and the victims playing a key role in shaping the reconciliation path and results. The ultimate purpose of a reconciliation process is the moral and humane goals of justice and peace. However, the reconciliation process itself is most dominated by the realistic play of "balance of powers." When we deal with the past atrocities, we can not escape from facing the power structure. Instead, we must try to understand the power structure and find any possible ways to go beyond the structural constraints of power.

Second, the historical issue in Sino-Japanese relations is a "two-level game" between domestic politics and international relations. Chinese and Japanese leaders must consider both the bilateral relationship as well as their own domestic politics. At the international level, the balance of power in East Asia has determined the general orientation of Sino-Japanese relations. At domestic level, the state-society relationship and domestic politics have influenced the interpretations of the history as well as reconciliation process between China and Japan.

Third, in transitional conflict reconciliation, individual victims and survivors of an atrocity are usually the weakest in the power structure of post- conflict. The reconciliation effort at the inter-governmental level can not, on its own, resolve a transitional conflict. Instead, the wounds of those individuals are located deep within society and will have an enduring effect on the reconciliation process. The governments involving in transitional conflict reconciliation should pay specific attention to the needs of individual victims and survivors.

Fourth, the history and interpretations of an atrocity are usually "politicized" by the parties involved. In most situations, we can not escape the shaping and influence of history and must actively look for alternatives to deal with history.

(The author is a PhD student at Kent State University in Ohio, USA.)

² A similar case is the German aid to Israel as an indirectly way of compensation for the Holocaust.

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