

RAPE OF NANKING

JENNIFER BUTT

The ethics of war, according to Paul Seabury and Angelo Codevilla's *War: Ends and Means*, can be examined from two perspectives to determine "whether it is right or wrong to fight for a particular cause in a particular circumstance—*jus ad bellum* [or] whether particular actions taken in the course of a war are right or not—*jus in bello*" (215). The theory of *jus in bello* stresses that "the enemy in war is not so much a set of persons—much less whole peoples—but rather a set of evil intentions . . . This rule is identical to the private commandment to hate the sin while loving the sinner" (225). This fundamental essence of *jus in bello* was grossly violated with the "unjust means of warfare" of indiscriminant killing of noncombatants and Chinese civilians by Japanese soldiers in what has been dubbed "The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II," or as it is known to the world, the Rape of Nanking. During the Rape, Chinese civilians were slaughtered and women of all ages were raped after the Japanese seized control of China's former capital, Nanking. It is said that if "the dead from Nanking were to link hands" they would "span a distance of some two hundred miles, their blood would weigh twelve hundred tons"; and, "stacked on top of each other, these bodies would reach the height of a seventy-four-story building" (Chang, *Rape* 5). It is, however, not the sheer number of civilians who perished that has caused recent international interest in the Rape, but rather the manner in which these atrocities were committed and Japan's refusal to acknowledge, apologize, or offer reparations to its survivors. For seven weeks, Japanese troops, who were often pictured celebrating and wearing wide smiles while posing next to fresh corpses, saturated victims in acid, impaled infants on bayonets, hung people by their tongues, slashed the bellies of pregnant women and ripped out their fetuses, nailed people to boards for bayonet practices, held publicized decapitation contests, and partially buried victims to their waists so that they might be eaten alive by dogs or trampled to death by horses. In their examination of the ethical nature of war, Seabury and Codevilla pinpoint the "behavior of Japanese troops in World War

II toward all their captives [as] another sad fact. Some people simply get satisfaction by making others suffer. The Japanese were not out to exterminate any class or race. They simply went out of their way to kill, rape, maim, starve, and humiliate . . . Asia will remember them for a thousand years” (232-33). While Asia may remember the Rape for thousands of years, the Japanese would like to forget that such a massacre ever occurred, publicly and vehemently denying their involvement in the Rape. Japanese revisionists, members of Japanese society who believe such fabricated “stories” of the Rape serve to tarnish the image of Japan and who seek to preserve an ideal image of their country, lead the movement of denial, which has extended to the elimination of the Rape from students’ textbooks, despite the vast evidence of letters, photographs, journals, and oral affirmations of the Rape by Chinese, Japanese, and foreigners present during that time. Although some Japanese progressives have publicly voiced their concern over the awareness of the Rape of Nanking, their efforts are largely overshadowed by the overwhelming sentiment and presence of indifference and ignorance displayed by revisionists, who wish to eliminate the already minuscule and vague references to the Rape in school textbooks. They falsify and misquote original documents, risking their careers in an attempt to rewrite wartime history so as to foster a sense of national pride in Japanese youth and preserve an ideal image of wartime Japan.

To give some historical context, the Rape of Nanking refers to the seven weeks following the Japanese seizure of Nanking, the former capital of China, on December 13, 1937. During this time an estimated 200,000 to 350,000 noncombatants were slaughtered and between 20,000 and 80,000 girls and women as young as ten and as old as eighty were raped. Putting these numbers into perspective, the death toll of the Rape exceeds the number of people killed in the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined. Such horrific acts took place despite the presence of foreigners in the city, some of whose pleadings with the Japanese embassy to end the massacre landed on deaf ears. These foreigners, including John Rabe, a member of the Nazi Party who saved hundreds of thousands of Chinese lives by repeatedly risking his own life, and who was dubbed by author Iris Chang as the “Oskar Schindler of China,” proved to be invaluable, not only for

attempting to save as many lives as possible but for their accounts, experiences, and observations which have cemented the events of the Rape into history through their letters, diaries, pictures, and oral affirmations of the Rape. Despite these original documents and photos, confessions by former Japanese soldiers, the stories of Nanking survivors, and the indictment of certain members of the Japanese army at the 1946 International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), Japan as a country has failed to acknowledge its war crimes and properly educate younger generations of Japanese about the Rape and World War II. While Germany has already “incorporated into their postwar political identity the concession that the wartime government itself, not just individual Nazis, was guilty of war crimes, the Japanese government . . . has never forced itself or Japanese society to do the same” (Seabury and Codevilla 232-33). Japan’s failure to admit and address its wartime crimes sets a dangerous precedent because it allows such atrocities to be repeated without consequences, ultimately creating a world void of ethics, integrity, or order. History textbooks used in Japanese middle and high schools mention, at the most, one or two sentences about the Rape, but use, according to Christopher Barnard, a “consistent pattern of language that has the effect of isolating knowledge of the Rape of Nanking from Japan and Japanese people” (519). Even these minimal references withstand pressure from Japanese revisionists, who seek the rewriting of all Japanese textbooks and the removal of such references because they believe the Rape to be a fabrication. Revisionists have come to include novelists, professors from top Japanese universities, cartoonists, and political leaders, which suggests that the danger of revisionist ideas reaching all aspects and members of Japanese society is very much real and present. Many revisionists, having initially denied that the Rape ever occurred, felt a need to modify their position due to the mounting international interest in the Rape and an increasing number of confessions from war veterans during the 1980s. By the late 1980s, revisionists had admitted, for the first time, that killing had occurred at Nanking; but they continue to argue that “the Nanjing Massacre was a historical fabrication, claiming that relatively few people were killed” and that “[such an] incident was no more horrifying than many other atrocities committed by various nations in the twentieth century”

(Fogel 94). It is both the unwillingness of the Japanese to face and accept the unethical nature of and extent of their role in a historically documented massacre, and the pressing need to maintain a version of national history that preserves the ideal image of wartime Japan which younger Japanese generations can be proud of, that have prompted ignorance among Japanese youth regarding the Rape. As stated above, references to the Rape in middle and high school texts are rather minuscule and abstract. School textbooks, furthermore, are subject to censorship by the Japanese Ministry of Education, which has requested many authors who address certain sensitive topics in Japanese history, such as the Rape of Nanking and the comfort women stations of World War II, to modify any overdescriptive passages regarding the Rape or passages that might be interpreted as denunciations of the Japanese government for their war crimes. Such actions suggest that the reluctance even to refer to the Rape is perhaps not an epidemic limited to the revisionists, but rather pervades much of Japanese society.

Although since the 1980s Japanese textbooks have begun to include a few sentences regarding the Rape of Nanking, this inclusion can hardly be deemed an improvement. On closer inspection such passages reveal a consistent pattern of grammar and language that isolate knowledge of the Rape from Japan and the Japanese people, resulting in the inability of Japanese youth to “critically respond in an informed manner to denials within modern Japanese society that this atrocity took place” (Barnard 519). In a study which examines eighty-eight history textbooks approved by the Japanese Ministry of Education and subsequently implemented in Japanese high schools in 1995, Barnard analyzes the textbooks’ systemic grammatical usage and concludes that “the historiography of the textbooks tells far less than the frank truth” and that “what we see in the language of the textbooks is a reluctant telling of what has to be told” (527). Specifically, Barnard’s analysis finds that the isolation of knowledge of the Rape from Japan and Japanese people is implemented through three tactics: the manipulation of language to create a clear disparity between the portrayals of victims and perpetrators, the deflection of criticism away from the perpetrators, and the creation of a distinction of the Japanese army from the Japanese people. The

portrayal of the victims and perpetrators is consistent throughout Japanese textbooks in that “the victims are present at an individual human level, but the perpetrators are present only at an organisational level” (Barnard 523), as seen in the following example, translated from a Japanese textbook: “The Japanese army, having occupied Nanking in December at the conclusion of fierce fighting, slaughtered a large number of Chinese civilians” (Barnard 523). This example represents passages common throughout Japanese textbooks in that the author injects a certain amount of ambiguity and vagueness about the perpetrators of the Rape by labeling them as “the Japanese army” rather than “the Japanese people.” Barnard notes that “in the whole corpus of 88 textbooks, there is only one textbook that ascribes the killing to the ‘soldiers’ of the Japanese Army, i. e., Japanese ‘people’” (523). While supporters of such textbooks might consider noting the absence of the phrase “the Japanese people” in textbooks as overcritical, such an analysis is warranted because the “Japanese people not being at Nanking is but part of a pattern of ignoring Japanese involvement in the Rape of Nanking . . . [and] one major result of this pattern is that the links between the events at Nanking and Japanese society at the time, as well as the links between the Japan of 1937-38 and of today, are severed” (Barnard 524). Such language usage also raises questions about why students are given a grammatically manipulated historical account of the Rape, and if they can or will identify what is not in the texts, given the extent of revisionists’ vehement campaigns of denial. The prevailing notion present in textbooks—that the Japanese army as an organization, rather than Japanese soldiers, were at Nanking—lays the groundwork for deflecting criticism away from Japanese soldiers and individuals. If the Japanese army is solely responsible for the Rape of Nanking, criticism, therefore, can only be directed towards the army and the incident, as seen in the following example translated from a Japanese textbook:

The Japanese army, during a period of several weeks, inside and outside the city of Nanking killed a large number of Chinese people, including women. That number, including prisoners of war, is estimated to be one hundred and some tens of thousands. This incident, known as the Nanking Massacre, was the focus of

criticism from a number of foreign countries, but the Japanese people were not informed of the fact.

(Barnard 525)

In this passage, the authors accomplish two things in the last sentence, the first being to draw a distinction between the Japanese army and the Japanese people. It is illogical to say that the Japanese people were not informed of the Rape when those who led and carried out the atrocities of the Rape were themselves Japanese people. There ought to be, therefore, no distinction made between the Japanese army and Japanese people, for the mere presence of such a distinction suggests the desire to place blame upon an isolated group or organization, rather than on actual people. The second implication of this example is that Japan was a victim—as the target of an international attack about an incident that the Japanese people had no knowledge of, and which was discussed in the international community among foreigners who were, presumably, anti-Japanese (Barnard 527). Such a portrayal of Japan is consistent with the revisionist belief that Japan was the target of injustice and fabricated stories “by the Allies, which was a part of their administration of ‘victors’ justice’ to the Japanese” (527). Barnard concludes his study with the claim that “the question[ing] [of] the brutality of Japanese aggression, together with the teaching of a type of history that shies away from pinning down the responsibility for the atrocity, creates a climate of opinion that allows the historical fact of the Rape of Nanking to be either held up to questioning, or at least its magnitude to be doubted” (527).

Grammatical analysis of Japanese textbooks consistently reveals a reluctance to place blame and responsibility for the Rape of Nanking on the Japanese. Yet Japanese revisionists, in an effort to eliminate all such references in textbooks, have founded groups, such as the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, whose intention is to replace current historical texts, which are seen as “unconscionably full of evil distortion, masochism, and anti-Japanese qualities” eroding national pride among younger generations (Fogel 98), with a history that propagates national identity and pride. Revisionists insist that current textbooks, which mention war crimes and other unethical acts committed by Japan, portray Japan as evil. They claim that “when we [the

Japanese] write our history textbooks, we weigh every word, fearful of the reaction of neighboring nations. This is the epitome of . . . a nation ideologically and spiritually enslaved” (Yoshiaki 17). This is consistent with Barnard’s findings that Japan is constantly depicted as the victim and target of international scrutiny and attack. Such a position and portrayal are achieved through willful amnesia of the Rape and other war crimes, which “enables Japanese public memory to cast Japan in the role of universal victim of and witness to the horrors of war (as the world’s sole victim of atomic bombing) and liberator of Asia from the yoke of Western colonization” (Yoshiaki 5). Revisionists believe that the erosion of national pride and the aggressive and evil image of Japan are not only the result of current textbooks, but also of war memorials, which revisionists perceive as offensive by “unfairly highlight[ing] Japanese wartime atrocities . . . and cultivating national shame” (Fogel 99). While the Society for History Textbook Reform has not yet attained its goal of replacing all middle and high school textbooks with their own versions, revisionists and members of the Society, who have come to include prominent businessmen, politicians, academics, novelists, cartoonists, and athletes, have launched campaigns, within their respective career fields, targeting young and old Japanese people. Their aim is to promote the idea that Japan’s crimes, if any, were not any more brutal than those of other countries in wartime and that blame for supposed war crimes is not to be placed upon either Japan or its people. The cartoonist Kobayashi Yoshinori, for example, created “two comic books that depicted comfort women as prostitutes whose goal was to earn money, and emphasized that the Japanese government therefore had absolutely no responsibility toward them, [and] in Japan, where many young people no longer read books or newspapers, the influence of comic books cannot be ignored” (Yoshiaki 26). It is clear that because revisionists cannot completely deny their war crimes in light of the number of recent survivor accounts of victims and confessions of former soldiers, they attempt to alter historical accounts so that these crimes might be perceived as either consensual or inevitable and, perhaps, legal occurrences, given the circumstances. This notion is further cemented by Yoshinori’s statement, which supports Barnard’s belief that links between the Japan of 1937-38 and the Japan of

today are being severed, for “we [the Japanese people], living tranquil lives today in an era of peace, have absolutely no right to condemn and make criminals of our grandfathers, who fought and died thinking that they were fighting for the sake of ‘country and family’” (Yoshiaki 16).

While they push for a replacement of current textbooks with a version that lacks atonement and an acknowledgement of Japanese war crimes, revisionists are discrediting their Japanese and non-Japanese opponents by attacking both their integrity and work, without any regard, interest, or attention to the accumulating evidence against revisionist beliefs. Prior to the 1997 publication of Iris Chang’s *The Rape of Nanking: the Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, the academic community lacked any fully comprehensive and detailed account of the Rape. It is not surprising, then, that Chang’s book became the target of criticism by Japanese revisionists, especially by Japanese academics, who convened on June 12, 1998 to hold a “special conference organized for the sole purpose of denouncing [Chang] as a fraud,” claiming her book was “the most outrageous, world-class lie” (Chang, “History” 19). The six academics who held this conference were affiliated with different major Japanese universities, and their statements and beliefs are representative of the common and often recycled yet unsubstantiated revisionist remarks. Professor Kazunobu Oyama from Kanagawa University wrote that “Iris Chang has got something up her sleeve,” and “using a tactic reminiscent of Holocaust deniers, Tokyo University education professor and right-wing activist Nobukatsu Fujioka presented a series of massacre photos—with new, historically unsupportable captions” (Chang, “History” 19). Referring to Japanese soldiers’ common practice of bayoneting infants, Dokkyo University’s Akira Nakamura “offered his theory that bayoneting infants is ‘one of China’s traditional methods of killing children,’ and could never have been the work of Japanese soldiers.” Such an outright and blatant denial of a war crime that has been well documented in a wealth of sources including, but not limited to, American missionary diaries, U.S. Naval Intelligence reports, Japanese military diaries, letters and reports produced by the German Embassy, declassified American intercepts of Japanese communications, war-crimes transcripts, 1,700 testimonials from

Chinese survivors, and news reports, including front-page coverage of the massacre in *The New York Times* (Chang, “History” 19). Criticism of Chang, however, has not been restricted to Japanese people residing in Japan, as “even in the United States, Japanese reaction has been defensive [with] Ambassador Kunihiro Saito publicly criticiz[ing] [Chang’s] book as ‘one-sided,’ ‘erroneous,’ and filled with historical inaccuracies, [yet] when grilled by journalists and human-rights groups, he failed to produce a single concrete example to support his charges” (Chang, “History” 19). Japanese publishers have also opposed Chang’s book; one cancelled plans for a translation of Chang’s text in 1999 after Chang refused the publisher’s demands to “make changes in the book that [the publisher] found unacceptable” and “proposed releasing the volume simultaneously with a Japanese study criticizing her work” (Chang, “History” 19).

The general hostility and scramble to discredit opponents or perceived threats to the revisionist mission is not reserved solely for foreigners, but is also implemented to curb any Japanese person who might be perceived as critical of the government, as in the case of Japanese historian Ienaga Saburo. In 1965, Ienaga sued the Japanese government, whose Ministry of Education deleted excerpts that were deemed as critical of the government and demanded that he rewrite passages concerning the Rape of Nanking in his textbook. After changing such passages, the examiner from the Ministry “demanded that Ienaga delete his description of the Rape itself, claiming that ‘the violation of women is something that has happened in every era of human history [and] this is not an issue that needs to be taken up with respect to the Japanese Army in particular’” (Chang, *Rape* 206-7). Although Ienaga won his lawsuit after the Tokyo district court ruled in his favor, he, along with the judge and defense attorneys, received numerous death threats. It is also interesting to note that, with the exception of an award that he received in 1948, before his lawsuit, Ienaga “has been constantly ignored by the official committees that dole out national prizes in history” (Chang, *Rape* 207), which sends a clear discouragement from the government to academics, or to anyone for that matter, who wish to educate the public about historical events that may be unpopular with the government.

In addition to the attempt to discredit and ostracize anyone who dwells upon historical events that are sensitive to the Japanese government, revisionists have repeatedly risked their careers through a reckless disregard for other people's work and the rules of the academic world in order to achieve their goal of a Japanese history void of Japanese war crimes and misdeeds. In 1985, prominent revisionist Tanaka Masaaki, whose book on the Rape of Nanking contained reprinted passages of a Japanese general's diary, was found to have "tampered with the diary and altered its content in over 900 locations" (Yamamoto 242). Since his "unbelievable ethical violation," Tanaka has strengthened his revisionist stance, expressing no sense of wrongdoing on his part and still maintaining that the Rape is a fabrication (Yamamoto 243). Dishonesty has also prevailed outside the academic world. The Shochiku Fuji Distribution Company cut a thirty-second scene concerning the Rape from a Bernardo Bertolucci film biography of Pu Yi (Chang, *Rape* 210). Bertolucci, after becoming aware of the unapproved alteration of the film, stated that "not only did the Japanese distributor cut the whole sequence of the 'Rape of Nanking' without my authorization and against my will, without even informing me, but they also declared to the press that myself and the producer, Jerry Thomas, had made the original proposition to mutilate the movie, . . . [which] is absolutely false and revolting" (Chang, *Rape* 210). The distributors defended their actions by claiming that the scene was "'too sensational' to be shown in Japan" and that "the remov[al] [was] 'out of respect for Japanese audiences'" (Chang, *Rape* 210-11). While Tanaka and the Shochiku Fuji Distribution Company did not ultimately face severe consequences despite their unethical actions, others, such as former justice minister General Shigeto Nagano, have prematurely ended their careers by making controversial statements about the Rape. Nagano, who within days of his appointment as justice minister in 1994 stated that the Rape was a fabrication and that Korean comfort women were "licensed prostitutes," was forced to resign after violent reactions to his statements across Asia (Chang, *Rape* 203). It is apparent from the collective actions of revisionists that they are willing to resort to unethical actions and career-risking moves in order to whitewash a shameful portion of Japanese history from mainstream Japan.

Based upon the actions and recorded statements of Japanese revisionists, it is clear that they hope to erase any reference to and memory of the Rape of Nanking and other Japanese war crimes, which they perceive as detrimental to the national pride and identity of younger generations. Revisionists hope to achieve this goal by risking their careers to ensure that the revisionist spirit and notions are kept alive in younger generations, harassing and ostracizing those who seek to recount a history that is deemed a fabrication by revisionists, and working to eliminate the minuscule references to the Rape in textbooks that, according to a study that analyzes their grammatical structure, already tell “less than the frank truth” (Barnard 527). It is clear that the debate between progressives and revisionists over the validity of the Rape and how Japan ought to handle its past war crimes is not confined to the walls of the political or academic worlds. Rather, it involves young Japanese students who will ultimately lead Japan, and decide whether to continue the willful amnesia of the revisionists or accept the wealth of evidence supporting the existence of the Rape, and offer an apology that progressives believe will better Japan. An August 1995 survey conducted in Japan, which shows that “nearly half of those polled felt that Japan had done enough to compensate for its actions” (Jenkins 57), only solidifies the continuing damage and influence of Japanese revisionists. It is frightening to think that sixty-five years after the Rape of Nanking, Japan has still failed to acknowledge and apologize for their war crimes in World War II, which holds the danger of setting a precedent for how other countries might deal with their war crimes.

WORKS CITED

- Barnard, Christopher. “Isolating Knowledge of the Unpleasant: the Rape of Nanking in Japanese high-school textbooks.” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 22 (2001).
- Chang, Iris. “It’s History, Not a Lie.” *Newsweek* (20 Jul. 1998).

---. *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*. New York: Basic, 1997.

Fogel, Joshua A. *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2000.

Horowitz, Carl F. "Atrocity Exhibition." *Reason* (June 1998).

"Japan and Its Past." *Christian Science Monitor* (24 May 1994).

Jenkins, Russell. "The Japanese Holocaust." *National Review* (10 Nov. 1997).

Kaiyuan, Zhang, ed. *Eyewitnesses to Massacre: American Missionaries Bear Witness to Japanese Atrocities in Nanjing*. New York: Sharpe, 2001.

Pitman, J. "Repentance." *New Republic* (10 Feb. 1992).

Rabe, John. *The Good Man of Nanking: The Diaries of John Rabe*. Trans. John E. Woods. New York: Knopf, 1998.

Seabury, Paul, and Angelo Codevilla. *War: Ends and Means*. New York: Basic, 1990.

"Shigeto Nagano." *U.S. News & World Report* (16 May 1994).

Yamamoto, Masahiro. *Nanking: Anatomy of an Atrocity*. Westport: Praeger, 2000.

Yoshiaki, Yoshimi. *Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery in the Japanese Military during World War II*. Trans. Suzanne O'Brien. New York: Columbia UP, 1995.