

Nanjing Massacre 75th Anniversary and the China-Japan Island Dispute 南京大虐殺 75 年と中日諸島争い

Satoko Oka Norimatsu

Between 2012 and 2014 we posted a number of articles on contemporary affairs without giving them volume and issue numbers or dates. Often the date can be determined from internal evidence in the article, but sometimes not. We have decided retrospectively to list all of them as Volume 10, Issue 54 with a date of 2012 with the understanding that all were published between 2012 and 2014.

Satoko Norimatsu

What war memorial date does December call to mind? To many in Japan, it is probably December 8, the day the Asia-Pacific War began. But there is another date not to be forgotten, particularly this winter. December 13, 2012 was the 75th anniversary of the capture of Nanjing by the Japanese Imperial Army in 1937. It was a day when the Japanese nation was carried away with a sense of victory, with lantern parades being held across the nation. Meanwhile, in Nanjing, one of the cruelest series of atrocities in history was taking place – the Nanjing Massacre. The gruesome series of crimes – mass executions of Chinese POWs; murders of ordinary citizens who were alleged to be disarmed soldiers or soldiers wearing civilian clothing; murders of local residents, men and women, young and old, within the city and neighbouring villages; rape and murder of women, young and old; looting and arson – continued beyond mid-February of 1938 when the battle of Nanjing

ended, and only came to an end around the time when the Reformed Government of the Republic of China under Japanese hegemony was established at the end of March, 1938.

Although most people in Japan then were not informed of the Nanjing Massacre, perhaps many who happily paraded had something in common with the Japanese soldiers and officers who took part in the Massacre: they were discriminatory and hostile toward the Chinese people, and had lost the common sense of humanity, which was to respect their neighbours. What is chilling is that 75 years later, a similar atmosphere and mindset appear to prevail in Japan, with nationalism and fear fanned by the territorial dispute over the islands called Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China.

In Canada, events were held across the country to remember the 75th anniversary. The Toronto City Council unanimously passed a resolution, and Mayor Rob Ford proclaimed [Nanking Recognition Day](#) on December 13. In Vancouver, citizens of various backgrounds, including Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and European, came together to hold a roundtable discussion and a candlelight vigil to remember the victims of the massacre. The meeting was called by Joy Kogawa, a Japanese-Canadian author known for her novel *OBASAN* (Japanese translation is *Ushinawareta Sokoku*, Chuo Koron Sha, 1998). Kogawa, who was a victim of the Canadian government's wartime

incarceration of Japanese-Canadians, is dedicated to human rights and overcoming discrimination. She is also a strong supporter of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. The event was covered by local TV stations, and reported in various [Japanese-language local newspapers and magazines](#). In Japan, a weekly magazine *Shukan Kin'yobi* reported on the event (December 21 edition).



Nanjing Massacre 75th Anniversary Memorial, at [Historic Joy Kogawa House](#) in Vancouver, December 9, 2012. Photo by BC ALPHA.

In Nanjing, the 75th anniversary memorial was commemorated at the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum on December 13, attended by 9,000 people, including 100 Japanese. The mainstream Japanese media emphasized an incident in which a Japanese journalist covering the event was kicked from behind by two Chinese people, concluding that there still was “persistent anti-Japan sentiment.” Such violence was of course unacceptable, but news reports centred around this incident diverted attention from the true significance of the 75th memorial event. The news reports conveyed little sense that Japanese and Chinese on that memorial day should together extend

their hearts to the victims of the Massacre, putting aside contemporary conflicts. How would people in Japan feel if such attitude were shown by the US, towards the incendiary bombing that burned and killed people in a hundred cities across Japan, including the atomic-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

For the Nanjing 75th, it would have been appropriate for the Japanese government to hold a memorial event in order to critically reflect on the horrific incident and vow never to repeat such behavior again. Instead, there has been widespread minimization and denial of the Massacre in Japan, keeping students and the general public from the authentic historical material about the Massacre. Yet conscientious Japanese scholars and journalists have published extensively detailing the atrocities committed at Nanjing. For those who want to learn about the Nanjing Massacre in Japan, recommended readings include *Nanking Jiken* (Iwanami Shoten, 1997) and *Nankin Jiken Ronso Shi* (Heibonsha Shinsho, 2007) by Kasahara Tokushi, *Nankin Daigyakusatsu Hitei Ron 13 no Uso* (Kashiwa Shobo, 1998) by Nankin Jiken Chosa Kenkyu Kai, *Nankinsen-Tozasareta Kioku o Tazunete* (Shakai Hyoron Sha, 2002) by Matsuoka Tamaki, *Nankin no Shinjitsu* (Kodansha Shinsho, 2000) by John Rabe, and *Nankin Jiken no Hibi* (Otsuki Shoten, 1999) by Minnie Vautrin.

Some people in Japan call learning about Japan’s wartime aggression and atrocities “anti-Japanese” and a “masochistic view of history.” But just as learning about the Holocaust is NOT “anti-German” and learning about the atomic-bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is NOT “anti-American,” it is NOT “anti-Japanese” to learn about the horrors of Japanese imperialism and colonialism. Indeed, Japan’s future in Asia and the world lies in overcoming denial of the historical record as a

means to recover its humanity. The late Kato Shuichi told the young generation: the young are not responsible for the past wrongdoing of their country, but this does not mean that they do not need to be engaged. The young need to be engaged with history. The purpose of studying history lies in, for example, an active effort to examine whether the kind of discrimination and prejudice, which caused the Nanjing Massacre in the old days, still exists today. The postwar generation is responsible for learning from history and making sure never to wage war again. It is responsible for the present and the future.

Now, more than ever, history education is needed in the midst of the worsening relationship between Japan and China. It seems that many in Japan are not aware of the fact that the territorial dispute and the historical issues are inseparable for people in China. Zhu Chengshan, Director of the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Museum, emphasized that both the islands issue and the Nanjing Massacre are “historical problems,” at the press conference prior to the 75th memorial. 2012 was the 40th anniversary of normalization of Japan-China diplomatic relations, but it started in February with Nagoya Mayor Kawamura Takashi telling delegates from Nanjing, their sister city, that the Nanjing Massacre did not happen. The incident was followed by then Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintaro declaring in April that the Tokyo Metropolitan Government would purchase the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands. In September, then Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko decided to nationalize the islands. For many in China, far from celebrating the 40th anniversary of the resumed China-Japan relationship, 2012 turned out to be a year in which they experienced salt continuously being rubbed into their wounds.

This article does not intend to take sides with

China in the territorial or historical issue. It is rather an attempt to convey to people in Japan that things are perceived quite differently if seen from the other side. Each side has claims in the territorial dispute, and there is no clear resolution in sight. However, the Japanese media characteristically reports any news on the issue by referring to the islands as “Senkaku Islands of Okinawa Prefecture,” which is, presuming Japanese sovereignty, and uncritically repeating the government’s position that the territorial dispute “does not exist.” Japanese media reported the “rioting” of Chinese anti-Japan demonstrators over and over, but do not report on the threat and fear that residents in Japan with foreign nationalities, including Chinese and Korean, experience on a daily basis by violence and verbal attacks of xenophobic right-wing groups. Japanese media repeat the mantra of “Chinese invasion of Japanese territorial seas” and “Chinese invasion of Japanese territorial airspace,” but from the Chinese perspective, it is Japan that is invading their seas and airspace.

Is it not common sense for us to try to get along with our neighbours—all the more so neighbours with deep historical ties—and not seek to inflame relations? But now in Japan, sensible voices have been overwhelmed by the anti-China, and China-hating campaigns put out daily by the government and the media. What is most frightening in Japan right now is that while hardliner attitudes towards China seem to have swept through the nation, there seems to be an absolute lack of sense of crisis over the rising military tension around Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands. Are people in Japan preparing for another lantern parade? Now that the LDP-led conservative government of Prime Minister Abe Shinzo is back in power, ethnocentrism, history distortion, and military expansion are accelerating in Japan. The Abe government has expressed its intent to revise or rewrite the

government's textbook screening policy that pays consideration to the neighbouring countries, the Kono Statement that recognized and apologized for the military's involvement in wartime sex slavery, and the Murayama Statement that critically reflected on Japan's aggressive wars. Since the beginning of 2013, many articles have appeared in the world media criticizing the historical revisionism of the Abe government, not just in Asia, but in the US and Europe, including *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Spiegel Online*, and *The Economist*.

calls on people in Japan not to deny history, not to deny the territorial dispute, and to make good friends with their Asian neighbours, so that the wrongdoing of 75 years ago will never be repeated.

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In the wake of such moves, Canadian citizens initiated a new movement called *Denial No more – for justice and reconciliation in Asia*, inspired by *Idle No More*, a fast-growing movement for enhancing rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada. *Denial No More*

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