

FILM REVIEWS

In the Name of the Emperor

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY NANCY TONG

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NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10003

52 MINUTES

COLOR. BLACK AND WHITE

In December 1937, Japanese soldiers began their occupation of Nanjing with a brutal rampage of murder and rape, known now as the “Nanjing Massacre,” or the “Rape of Nanjing.” Nancy Tong’s film is not so much an assessment of that event and its aftermath as it is an eyewitness recounting of the horrors. The

story is told without fluff; it is straightforward, unadorned, and painful.

The heart of the film consists largely of reminiscences by participants and eyewitnesses, along with contemporary film and photographic evidence. There are some very grisly pictures of burned, stabbed, and shot victims—both living and dead. These images are in marked contrast with Japanese newsreel footage of victorious Japanese soldiers, their “glorious victory,” and their welcome into Nanjing.

Among the primary informants for this film are former Japanese soldiers, who describe killing Chinese soldiers and civilians alike. Though they regret what happened, and do not attempt to excuse it, the matter-of-fact way in which they describe horrible events is chilling. Diaries of missionaries, refugee workers, and

other foreigners form much of the documentary material on which the film is based.

It was not just the number of people who were killed that was shocking, but the *manner* in which they were killed. (One person describes Chinese being used for bayonet practice.) For the past sixty years, estimates of the number of murder and rape victims have fluctuated considerably, but there can be no question that the scale and the severity of the atrocities were stunning. This film cites records of charity organizations in Nanjing, indicating that they buried “at least 200,000” people killed in the massacre, in addition to another 150,000 reportedly disposed of by Japanese. On the subject of rape, the film refers to the Tokyo War Crimes Trials, records of which disclose that at least 20,000 women were raped and killed in the first month of occupation alone. Rape victims included little girls, old women, and pregnant women. Many rape victims were subsequently killed to eliminate witnesses.

Stung by international criticism of their actions in Nanjing, Japanese government and military officials sought a way to avoid a repetition of the incident. The so-called “comfort women” were to be the solution to the problem of large-scale rape of local women. Over the course of the war, an estimated 200,000 Asian (and some Western) women were forced into sexual slavery to serve Japanese soldiers. It was not unusual for them to be forced to serve 30–50 men a day. Most of these women came from Korea, occupied by Japan since 1910. Some of them were lured into “service” by promises of legitimate jobs; others were abducted outright.

The first-person recollections proceed without interference from the interviewer. In addition to the stories of former soldiers,



Azuma Shiro, former soldier of the Japanese Imperial Army, spoke on atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers in China for the film *In the Name of the Emperor*.

Photo by Nancy Tong

Nanjing residents, the son of a missionary, and a former "comfort woman," there is also the testimony of Yoshimi Yoshiaki, one of the first researchers to reveal the Nanjing atrocities, and Ienaga Saburo, who continues to wage a legal battle against the Japanese government over the issue of textbook censorship.

Some of the most riveting (and unpleasant) moments in this film come from the camera of John Magee, a missionary in Nanjing at the time of the massacre. He secretly filmed scenes of the invasion and many of the victims. Magee himself testified at the Tokyo trial, giving accounts of murders by bayonet, guns, and drowning. His films were known at the time, and he made them available to prosecutors, but for some reason they were never used as evidence. This leads to speculation as to why issues of atrocities in Nanjing and elsewhere were never pursued vigorously in the postwar trials. Of the seven who received death sentences for their part in the war, only one was executed specifically for involvement in the Nanjing Massacre. All of the seven are now enshrined as martyrs at Yasukuni Shrine. It has long been clear that the Tokyo War Crimes Trials were not thorough investigations of wartime atrocities. This film again raises the question of whether the United States manipulated the trials in a way that would enhance its ability to create an ally in Japan (and make the emperor appear benevolent at the same time). In other words, the United States itself may have contributed materially to a tendency that angers so many Americans: the focus inside Japan on "Japan as victim," but not on Japan as an aggressor. For its part, not only has the Japanese government been reluctant to acknowledge the Nanjing Massacre or the formal

institution of sexual slavery, some government officials have, even in recent years, flatly denied that such things took place.

Government officials may deny the massacre, but just as regrettable is the level of ignorance among the general populace. At the end of the film, as at the beginning, we are introduced to the views of Japanese citizens, who seem ambivalent about their country's involvement in the war. Part of this ambivalence comes from ignorance of what happened, but part comes from a fabricated postwar nationalism colored with glorious stories of the war, and symbols (such as Yasukuni) that add tangible potency to those stories.

Even beyond questions of conspiracies, legacies, and trials, however, this film contains powerful material. Subtitles are not always grammatical, and transitions are not always smooth, but these are minor matters in a film that can certainly be recommended for both high school and college/university classes. The central point is perhaps best stated midway through the film by a former Japanese soldier: "The Japanese army was not an army for the people. First of all, it's not a national army—it's the Emperor's army. Second, the army was made up of obedient soldiers who served the Emperor only, soldiers who had no opinion and obeyed like robots. . . . Just obey absolutely." ■

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China

Unleashing the Dragon

A FOUR-PART DOCUMENTARY SERIES BY MIRACLE PICTURES
HOSTED AND NARRATED BY JOAN CHEN

DISTRIBUTED BY
FIRST RUN/ICARUS FILMS
153 WAVERLY PLACE
NEW YORK, NY 10014

1995. 200 MINUTES (4 X 50 MIN.)
COLOR

Viewers familiar with the successful four-part, made-for-TV video series *Japan* (WTTW/Chicago, 1987), hosted and narrated by actress Jane Seymour, will recognize the same general style and format embraced in *China: Unleashing the Dragon*. Like *Japan*, *China* also uses a familiar actress appearing on location (sometimes even wearing an identical trenchcoat) to introduce each segment of the video as well as to provide narration and continuity between the various topics and comments from interviewees. But while sophisticated video coverage and analysis of Japanese society has been available for many years via engaging series like *Japan* and *The Faces of Japan* (WNET/New York, 1987), few equivalents have existed on the China side, especially in the fallow years since the Tiananmen Square events of 1989, when general interest in China seemed to wane. This painstakingly produced, carefully edited video series, *China: Unleashing the Dragon*, therefore, should be widely welcomed by educators and students concerned with the amazing changes going on in contemporary China, especially since this series is among the first to really probe the impact of the economic reforms going on since the late leader Deng

Xiaoping made the call to accelerate China's push to become a socialist market economy in 1992.

While no single video, even a nearly four-hour one, can do justice to all the many dramatic changes that have occurred in the short space of the two years from 1992–94 during which most of this video was filmed, nonetheless, *China: Unleashing the Dragon* goes far to enhance our understanding of the depth and far-reaching implications of the vast reforms now sweeping China. Employing a remarkable ability to match the narrative text with stunning visual images, unusual in all but the best documentary films, this video's strength lies even more in its phenomenal ability to capture the paradoxes and ironies of a society in the midst of a high-speed transition, with all the excitement and chaotic behavior accompanying the current experiments with economic reform. As the video itself remarks, the end result of all this change can only be guessed, but the basic forces shaping the transition are well documented and presented in this series.

China: Unleashing the Dragon is divided into four fifty-minute episodes based on broad themes, with most episodes further subdivided to explore interesting tangents. In addition, fascinating