

The Nanjing Massacre

A Japanese Journalist Confronts Japan's National Shame

BY HONDA KATSUICHI

EDITED BY FRANK GIBNEY, TRANSLATED BY KAREN SANDNESS

ARMONK: M. E. SHARPE, 1999

367 PAGES, ISBN 0765603357, PAPERBACK

REVIEWED BY PHYLLIS R. PARKER

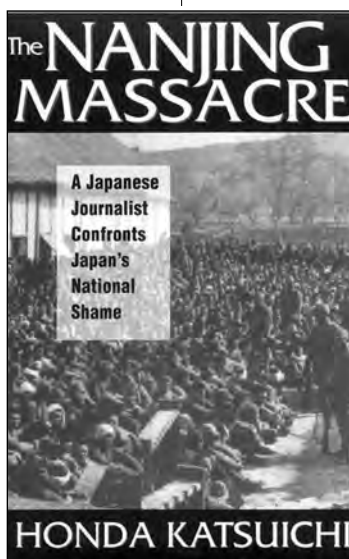
Honda Katsuichi's *Nanjing Massacre: A Japanese Journalist Confronts Japan's National Shame* is not light reading nor for the faint of heart. It is a searing but even account of the systematic butchery of between 150,000 to 300,000 Chinese villagers and unarmed soldiers by an invading Japanese Imperial Army that had been instructed to live off the land and have their provisions furnished "by the enemy." Given the lack of troop supply plans, Commander-in-Chief General Matsui Iwani, who was later hanged for war crimes, had expressly forbidden the killing of prisoners; however the military atrocities outlined in this book were clearly condoned by the high officer corps.

The Nanjing Massacre, which took place between November 1937 and February 1938, was part of a larger Japanese invasion and occupation of China that began with the "Manchurian Incident" in 1931, and continued until the end of World War II. Honda's narrative is journalistic in style. He carefully documents this story with diary entries, photographs, soldier scrapbooks, and interviews with both Chinese victims as well as Japanese soldiers who, after many years, have wanted to confess their part in the atrocities. All of this is juxtaposed paradoxically with official Japanese writings of the time. The communiqués back home told of sturdy young soldiers who killed a bird to add to their rice meal as they fought bravely in the name of the Emperor. The first person accounts of the same time and place graphically tell another, more horrifying story of methodical and relentless slaughter of peasants who were viewed as less than human by the invading Japanese.

This book grew out of earlier works by Honda, *Chūgoku no tabi* (Travels in China) in 1972 and *Nankin e no michi* (The Road to Nanking) in 1987, as well as serialized articles from the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*. As a journalist, Honda has written on a wide variety of topics, including the Vietnam War and Pol Pot in Cambodia. His interviews with innocent peasants caught in the crossfire of those events led him to turn to his own country's wartime past and to the whitewashed presentation of the "Fifteen Years War" and, more specifically, the Nanjing Massacre. Taking advantage of the opening of China to reporters, Honda made the first of four working trips to China to trace events of World War II and collect

Honda's account of the Nanjing Massacre provides significant first-person material that could be used by teachers and students alike.

interviews. His carefully told stories are compelling. These are not single incidents perpetrated by one or two crazy individuals. This book tells of a wanton and massive use of terror with the intent of bringing a nation to its knees.



In Honda's words, "Unlike the Germans and Italians, the Japanese have not made their own full accounting of their prewar actions." Honda's work has played a significant role in a textbook controversy in Japan where, as Frank Gibney, in the editor's introduction, describes an "apparent historical amnesia of most Japanese about the wartime misdeeds of their troops." Understandably, war is ugly, but there are agreed-upon restrictions to the horrors man can inflict upon man. Certainly events in the winter of 1937–38 in China were well outside the limits sanctioned by the Geneva Convention. Japan has been slow to acknowledge culpability, but Honda hopes that his book might be "thought of as a substitute for something the nation itself ought to do." And in having his writings published in this edition in English, Honda states he wishes to go beyond mere reporting of facts, and to promote outside pressure on his government to bring about change. In this sense, Honda calls himself an "ardent Japanese patriot."

Honda's account of the Nanjing Massacre provides significant first-person material that could be used by teachers and students alike. The book is clearly written and includes helpful maps and pictures as well as notes on interviews. In this work, Honda makes available valuable primary source materials that contribute not only to a greater understanding of events in China in World War II, but also offer a context for discussion of how wars work, the role of propaganda in war, and the use of terror in acquiring a military goal. The book includes an index, and while a bibliography would have been of use in a book of this nature, this work is nevertheless well documented and will be an important resource for English speaking readers. ■

PHYLLIS R. PARKER teaches World History at Rockbridge County High School in Lexington, Virginia. She has received several local, national, and international awards, including an Excellence in Teaching Award through the US State Department and the American Councils for International Education, and travel fellowships through the Keizai Koho Center (Japan), the Armonk Foundation (Germany), the Korea Society (Korea), and the Teaching East Asia Program at the University of Colorado (China). She has contributed articles to journals on teaching about Japan and about Korea, and her book, *Brazil and the Quiet Intervention*, was published in three languages. Her students and her school's Interact Club are involved in helping rebuild a vocational school destroyed by civil war in Sierra Leone.