

# FOREWORD



**O**N DECEMBER 13, 1937, Nanking, the capital city of Nationalist China, fell to the Japanese. For Japan, this was to have been the decisive turning point in the war, the triumphant culmination of a half-year struggle against Chiang Kai-shek's armies in the Yangtze Valley. For Chinese forces, whose heroic defense of Shanghai had finally failed, and whose best troops had suffered crippling casualties, the fall of Nanking was a bitter, perhaps fatal defeat.

We may now think of Nanking as a turning point of a different sort. What happened within the walls of that old city stiffened Chinese determination to recover it and to expel the invader. The Chinese government retreated, regrouped, and ultimately outlasted Japan in a war that ended only in 1945. In those eight years Japan would occupy Nanking and set up a government of Chinese collaborators; but it would never rule with confidence or legitimacy, and it

could never force China's surrender. To the larger world, the "rape" of Nanking—as it was immediately called—turned public opinion against Japan in a way that little else could have.

That is still the case in China, where several generations have now been taught of Japan's crimes and of its failure, to this day, to atone for them. Sixty years later, the ghosts of Nanking still haunt Chinese-Japanese relations.

Well they might. The Japanese sack of China's capital was a horrific event. The mass execution of soldiers and the slaughtering and raping of tens of thousands of civilians took place in contravention of all rules of warfare. What is still stunning is that it was *public* rampage, evidently designed to terrorize. It was carried out in full view of international observers and largely irrespective of their efforts to stop it. And it was not a temporary lapse of military discipline, for it lasted seven *weeks*. This is the terrible story that Iris Chang tells so powerfully in this first, full study in English of Nanking's tragedy.

We may never know precisely what motivated Japanese commanders and troops to such bestial behavior. But Ms. Chang shows more clearly than any previous account just what they did. In doing so she employs a wide range of source materials, including the unimpeachable testimony of third-party observers: the foreign missionaries and businessmen who stayed in the defenseless city as the Japanese entered it. One such source that Ms. Chang has uncovered is the diary—really a small archive—of John Rabe, the German businessman and National Socialist who led an international effort to shelter Nanking's population. Through Rabe's eyes we see the dread and courage of Nanjing's inhabitants as they confront, defenseless, the Japanese onslaught. Through Ms. Chang's account we appreciate the bravery of Rabe and others who tried to make a difference as the city was being burned and its inhabitants assaulted; as hospitals were closed and morgues filled; and as chaos reigned around them. We read, too, of those Japanese who understood what was happening, and felt shame.

The Rape of Nanking has largely been forgotten in the West, hence the importance of this book. In calling it a "forgotten

Holocaust," Ms. Chang draws connections between the slaughter in Europe and in Asia of millions of innocents during World War II. To be sure, Japan and Nazi Germany would only later become allies, and not very good allies at that. But the events at Nanking—to which Hitler surely took no exception—would later make them moral co-conspirators, as violent aggressors, perpetrators of what would ultimately be called "crimes against humanity." W. H. Auden, who visited the China war, made the connection earlier than most:<sup>1</sup>

*And maps can really point to places  
Where life is evil now:  
Nanking; Dachau.*

—WILLIAM C. KIRBY,  
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History and Chairman of the  
Department of History,  
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<sup>1</sup>From W. H. Auden, *Collected Shorter Poems, 1930–1944* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), "In Time of War," XVI, pp. 279–80.