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THE OCCUPATION OF NANKING



THE RAPE of Nanking continued for months, although the worst of it was concentrated in the first six to eight weeks. By the spring of 1938 the people of Nanking knew that the massacre was over, and that while they would be occupied they would not necessarily all be killed. As Nanking lay prostrate under Japanese rule, the military began to implement measures to subjugate the entire population.

At first there was not much to subjugate. "You cannot imagine the disorganization of the city," one foreigner wrote, "the dumping of filth and every kind of waste everywhere." Trash and human flesh putrefied in the streets because the Japanese did not permit anything to be done without their permission—not even the disposal of garbage and corpses. Indeed, for days army trucks drove over several feet of corpses under the Water Gate, grinding

over the remains in order to impress upon the populace the terrible results of resisting Japan.

Observers estimated that Japanese damage to public property totaled some \$836 million, in 1939 U.S. dollars, and that the private property loss was at least \$136 million. These figures do not include the cost of irreplaceable cultural artifacts taken by the Japanese army.

Under the direction of the sociologist Lewis Smythe, the International Safety Zone Committee conducted a systematic survey of damage to the Nanking area. Investigators visited every fiftieth inhabited house in the city and also went to every tenth family in every third village in the countryside. In a sixty-page report released in June 1938, Smythe concluded that the 120 air raids that Nanking experienced and the four-day siege of the city did only 1 percent of the damage inflicted by the Japanese army after it entered Nanking.

Arson caused most of the destruction. Fires in Nanking began with the fall of the city and lasted more than six weeks. Soldiers torched buildings under the guidance of officers and even used special chemical strips to set the fires. They burned down churches, embassies, department stores, shops, mansions, and huts—even areas within the Safety Zone. The zone leaders could not put out these fires because their pumps and fire equipment had been stolen by the Japanese. By the end of the first few weeks of the Rape of Nanking, the military had incinerated one-third of the entire city and three-fourths of all the stores.

They burned down the Russian legation embassy, defiled the American embassy, and ransacked almost every foreign house—even those marked clearly with flags or seals. The Japanese reserved American property for special insult: they tore down the American flag six times from the University of Nanking and trampled it in the dirt, threatening to kill anyone who dared to put it up again. But German property suffered almost as badly as American property, despite the alliance between the Nazi and Japanese governments. The Japanese tore down Nazi flags, burned German homes and businesses, and even stole pictures of Hitler and Hindenburg, a “remarkable”

act, one German wrote, "considering the cult of the Japanese for their emperor pictures."

The consequences of the sack of Nanking extended far beyond the city walls. Japanese soldiers devastated the countryside around Nanking, torching entire villages by burning down straw huts and collecting furniture, tools, and farming implements into brick houses so that everything could be incinerated all at once. The region near the city was stripped clean of farm animals, both domestic and otherwise.

The Japanese also used acetylene torches, pistol shots, and hand grenades to blast open vaults in banks, including the personal safe deposit boxes of German officials and residents. Soldiers were permitted to mail back to Japan some of their booty, but most of the goods were confiscated and concentrated for official use. Warehouses filled rapidly with rare jade and porcelain artwork, rugs and paintings, gold and silver treasures. More than two hundred pianos were housed in a single storage hall. In late December the Japanese began to heap stolen goods—jewelry, art, furniture, metal, antiques—on the wharves for transport back to Japan.

Japanese looters usually sought big-ticket items. They coveted foreign cars, prompting committee members to believe that the army would have taken all of them in the city if foreigners were not sitting in them. (Trucks used to cart corpses away were also stolen.) But the Japanese also invaded Nanking University Hospital to steal trivial items—pens, flashlights, and wristwatches from the nurses—and broke into the Safety Zone repeatedly to steal bedding, cooking utensils, and food from the homeless. A German report noted that on December 15 the Japanese had forced five thousand refugees to line up so that they could steal a total of \$180 from them. "Even handfuls of dirty rice were snatched from them by the soldiers," George Fitch wrote. "Death was the sure retort to any complaint."

In January 1938, not one shop was officially open in Nanking except for a military store and the International Committee's

rice shop. The harbor was practically empty of ships. Most of the city lacked electricity, telephone, and water service because the Japanese had rounded up and executed some fifty employees from the local power plant. (The lack of running water made it difficult to bathe, but many women chose not to bathe anyway, in hopes that their unwashed flesh would repel Japanese soldiers intent on raping them.)

Slowly the city came back to life. People could be seen ransacking houses throughout Nanking—ripping out floorboards and wood paneling for firewood and carting away metal and brick to repair their own homes or to sell on the streets to others. On Shanghai Road in the Safety Zone, dense crowds of people clustered before hundreds of vendors who sold every kind of loot imaginable, including doors and windows. This activity jump-started the local economy, for next to the roadside merchants of booty mushroomed new teahouses and restaurants.

On January 1, 1938, the Japanese inaugurated a new city government: the Nanking Self-Government Committee (the *Nanjing zizhi weiyuanhui*)—or “Autonomous Government,” as some of the Westerners in the city called it. The Self-Government Committee was staffed with Chinese puppet officials who controlled the city’s administration, welfare, finance, police, commerce, and traffic. By spring Nanking was outwardly starting to function like a normal city again. Running water, electric lighting, and daily mail service resumed. A Japanese city bus service started, rickshas appeared in the streets, and people could take the train from Nanking to Shanghai. Nanking quickly became a busy shipping center for the Japanese as small locomotives, horses, field pieces, trucks, and other supplies were ferried daily from the city to nearby Pukow.

But signs of a brutal occupation were everywhere. Chinese merchants endured heavy taxes and rent extortion to finance the salaries of the new officials in power. The Japanese also opened up military shops for the Chinese populace that drained the city of Chinese gold and money and replaced it with worthless military currency. The Chinese puppet government compounded the poverty by confiscating valuables and

stocks of inventory that remained in the city, even if the owner was still in town, leading some of the lower Chinese officials to joke cynically among themselves: "We are now doing an authorized plundering."

Far more alarming than the exploitation of the populace by taxes and confiscation was the reappearance of opium in the city. Before the Japanese occupation, opium was an underground narcotic, secretly smoked in the back rooms of Nanking by aristocrats and merchants. But it was not sold openly and brazenly in the streets, nor was it conspicuously paraded before young people. After the fall of the city, people could freely stroll into opium dens without interference from the police. These dens boldly advertised the drug with Chinese character shingles marked *Kuang To*, or "Official Earth"—a term used for opium.

To encourage addiction and further enslave the people, the Japanese routinely used narcotics as payment for labor and prostitution in Nanking. Heroin cigarettes were offered to children as young as ten. Based on his research, the University of Nanking history professor Miner Searle Bates concluded that some fifty thousand people in the Nanking area were using heroin—one-eighth of the population at the time.

Many of the downtrodden citizens of Nanking fell prey to drugs because it gave them the means to escape, if only temporarily, from the misery of their lives. Some even tried to use opium to commit suicide, swallowing large doses as poison. Others turned to crime to support their addiction, causing a wave of banditry to sweep through Nanking. After making conditions ripe for banditry in Nanking, the Japanese used the epidemic of crimes to justify their occupation, preaching the need for imperial law and order.

Japanese employers treated many of the local Chinese laborers worse than slaves, often killing them for the slightest infractions. Survivors later claimed that a harsh environment and capricious punishment were deliberately imposed upon the workplace to keep Chinese employees in a constant state of fear. One Chinese man who worked in a factory seized by the Japanese described the horrors that he witnessed there over the

period of a few months. When a fellow employee was falsely accused by a Japanese overseer of stealing his sweater, he ended up being wrapped with rope, almost mummylike, from feet to throat and then stoned to death with a heap of bricks. By the end of the stoning, the body had lost all shape, and the flesh and bones, entwined with the rope, was thrown to the dogs as food. Another time, the Japanese found four small shoulder pads missing from the factory and discovered they had been used as toilet paper. A twenty-two-year-old woman who admitted that she had used the toilet that day was dragged behind the factory and beheaded with a knife. That very afternoon the same Japanese murderer also killed a teenage boy whom he accused of stealing a pair of slippers.

The Japanese even inflicted medical experiments on the Nanking people. In April 1939, they opened up a facility in the city to conduct research on human guinea pigs whom they called *zaimoku*, or "lumber." On East Chungshan (or Zhongsan) Street, only a short walk from the Yangtze River, the Japanese converted a six-story Chinese hospital into a laboratory for research in epidemics, which they named Unit Ei 1644. Though the laboratory was situated near a military airport, a geisha district, movie theaters, and conspicuous Japanese centers such as the Japanese consulate, the military police office, and the headquarters for the Chinese Expeditionary Force High Command, it remained a closely guarded secret. A high brick wall surrounded the compound, topped with barbed wire; the facility was patrolled by guards; the staff was ordered never to mention Ei 1644 in their letters back to Japan. Inside scientists injected or fed Chinese prisoners with a variety of poisons, germs, and lethal gases; the substances included doses of acetone, arsenate, cyanide, nitrite prussiate, and snake poisons such as cobra, habu, and amagasa venom. The Japanese scientists killed about ten or more people weekly in this manner and disposed of them in the Ei 1644 incinerator.

When the Japanese surrendered in August 1945, the staff of Ei 1644 destroyed their equipment and data, blew up the laboratory, and fled before Chinese troops could reach Nanking. We know about this secret laboratory only because some scien-

tists of the unit confessed their activities to American interrogators after the war.

Those Chinese in the city fortunate enough to escape the physical brutality, the Japanese medical experiments, and the lure of drugs lived under a suffocating atmosphere of military intimidation. The Japanese authorities devised a method of mass control by organizing the population into a pyramidal hierarchy. Every ten households were ordered to appoint a head man, and every ten of those heads were ordered to appoint another head, and so on. Under this system, every man in Nanking was required to carry a registration card signed by his heads of ten, one hundred, and one thousand men attesting to his loyalty to the new government. Every person was also required to report the presence in his household of any unknown or unregistered person to the immediate head of ten, who reported it to his direct head, and on up until the news reached the district officer of the city government. This was not a Japanese invention, but a traditional Chinese system called *baojia*, revived, no doubt, by the Japanese to legitimize their rule among the natives in Nanking.

The Japanese subjected this *baojia* system to frequent tests, sometimes releasing men without passes in the city to see if they could find a place to stay. If the men were not caught and reported within two hours, the heads of the groups in the neighborhoods where they stayed would be severely punished. "This," the committee member Albert Steward wrote in his diary in 1939, "is supposed to be the Japanese way of preserving loyalty to the new regime."

In spite of war, fire, and massacre, Nanking recovered. The dreaded famine never struck, not only because the Japanese eventually permitted shipments of food to enter the city, but because local farmers were able to harvest winter wheat crops after most of the Japanese troops left Nanking to pursue Chinese forces inland. Within the space of a year, much of the agriculture in the fertile Yangtze delta area produced yields close to prewar levels. This is not to say that Nanking did not suffer

food shortages under Japanese occupation. The gardens and farms inside the city walls failed to thrive because soldiers not only confiscated vegetables from them but forced the farmers to dig up and transport the produce for Japanese use. Also, as the war dragged on, Japanese authorities in Nanking tightened their hold on supplies and heavily rationed necessities such as coal and rice. But there is no evidence to suggest that Nanking endured worse hunger or malnutrition than other areas in China. Other cities, such as the new Nationalist capital of Chungking, had suffered far worse food shortages during the war.

Though the sale of opium and heroin thrived under Japanese rule, the population of Nanking remained relatively free of disease. After occupation, Japanese authorities in the city enacted rigorous policies to burn corpses that had perished from illness. They also began an aggressive inoculation program against cholera and typhoid, subjecting the people to shots several times a year. Chinese medical officers waited in the streets and in the train station to administer inoculations to pedestrians or visitors as they came into the city. This created great resentment among the civilians, many of whom feared the needles would kill them. Children of Western missionaries also remember that at the train station Chinese visitors to Nanking were ordered to step into pans of disinfectant—a requirement that many found deeply humiliating. (The Westerners themselves were often sprayed with Lysol upon entering the city.)

Within a few years Nanking pulled itself up from its ruins. In the spring of 1938, men started to venture back to the city—some to examine the damage, others to find work because they had run out of money, still others to see whether conditions were safe enough for their families to return. As reconstruction began, the demand for labor grew. Soon, more men were lured back, and before long their wives and children joined the influx of migration toward Nanking. Within a year and a half, the population had doubled, surging from an estimated 250,000–300,000 people in March 1938 to more than 576,000 people in December 1939. Though the population

failed to reach the 1-million level that the city had enjoyed back in 1936, by 1942 the population peaked at about 700,000 people and stabilized for the duration of the war.

Life under the Japanese was far from pleasant, but a sense of resignation settled over the city as many came to believe that the conquerors were there to stay. Occasionally there was underground resistance—once in a while someone would run into a theater packed with Japanese officials and throw a bomb—but in general such rebellion was sporadic and rare. Most of the hostility against the Japanese was expressed nonviolently, such as in anti-Japanese posters, fliers, and graffiti.

The end of Nanking's ordeal came at last in the summer of 1945. On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped an untested uranium bomb on Hiroshima, Japan's eighth-largest city, killing 100,000 of its 245,000 people on the first day. When a Japanese surrender was not forthcoming, the Americans dropped, on August 9, a second, plutonium-type bomb on the Japanese city of Nagasaki. Less than a week later, on August 14, the Japanese made the final decision to surrender.

The Japanese remained in the former capital of China until the day of the surrender, then quickly left the city. Eyewitnesses reported that Japanese soldiers could be seen drinking heavily or weeping in the streets; some heard rumors of unarmed Japanese men being forced to kneel by the side of the road to be beaten by local residents. Retaliation against the Japanese garrison appears to have been limited, however, because many residents hid at home during this chaotic time, too fearful to even celebrate in case the news of a Japanese defeat turned out not to be true. The evacuation was swift, and there was no mass persecution or imprisonment of Japanese soldiers. One Nanking citizen recalls that she stayed in her house for weeks after the Japanese surrendered, and when she reemerged, they were gone.