

EPILOGUE



THE RAPE OF NANKING was only one incident in a long saga of Japanese barbarism during nine years of war. Before the great massacre, Japan had already earned notoriety as the first country in Asia to break the taboo and use airpower not only as a battlefield weapon but as a means of terrorizing civilian populations. Then it launched its armed forces on a campaign of slaughter that started in Shanghai, moved through Nanking, and proceeded inland.

While there was no Japanese equivalent of a "final solution" for the Chinese people, the imperial government endorsed policies that would wipe out everyone in certain regions in China. One of the deadliest was the "Three-all" policy ("Loot all, kill all, burn all") in northern China, where Communist Chinese guerrillas had fought the Japanese furiously and effectively. In his diary, a frustrated Japanese colonel reveals the cruel simplicity of this policy: "I have received orders

from my superior officer that every person in this place must be killed."

The result was a massive terrorist campaign in 1941 designed to exterminate everyone in the northern Chinese countryside. It reduced the population there from 44 million to 25 million people. At least one author on China, Jules Archer, believes that the Japanese killed most of the 19 million people who disappeared from the region, though other scholars speculate that millions must have fled to safer ground. R. J. Rummel, author of *China's Bloody Century*, points out that even if only 5 percent of the population loss consisted of murder victims, that would still amount to nearly 1 million Chinese.

The Japanese also waged ruthless experiments in biological warfare against the Chinese. Some of it was retaliatory and directed against Chinese villages suspected of helping American fliers during the April 1942 Doolittle raid of Tokyo. In areas that may have served as landing zones for the bombers, the Japanese massacred a quarter-million civilians and plowed up every Chinese airfield within an area of twenty thousand square miles. Here as well as elsewhere during the war, entire cities and regions were targeted for disease. We now know that Japanese aviators sprayed fleas carrying plague germs over metropolitan areas like Shanghai, Ningpo, and Changteh, and that flasks of disease-causing microbes—cholera, dysentery, typhoid, plague, anthrax, paratyphoid—were tossed into rivers, wells, reservoirs, and houses. The Japanese also mixed food with deadly germs to infect the Chinese civilian and military population. Cakes laced with typhoid were scattered around bivouac sites to entice hungry peasants; rolls syringed with typhoid and paratyphoid were given to thousands of Chinese prisoners of war before they were freed.

The final death count was almost incredible, between 1,578,000 and 6,325,000 people. R. J. Rummel gives a prudent estimate of 3,949,000 killed, of which all but 400,000 were civilians. But he points out that millions more perished from starvation and disease caused in large part by Japanese looting, bombing, and medical experimentation. If those deaths are added to the final count, then one can say that the Japanese

killed more than 19 million Chinese people in its war against China.

It is impossible for most people to imagine exactly what went through the minds of Japanese soldiers and officers as they committed the atrocities. But many historians, eyewitnesses, survivors, and the perpetrators themselves have theorized about what drove the naked brutality of the Japanese imperial army.

Some Japanese scholars believe that the horrors of the Rape of Nanking and other outrages of the Sino-Japanese War were caused by a phenomenon called "the transfer of oppression." According to Tanaka Yuki, author of *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II*, the modern Japanese army had great potential for brutality from the moment of its creation for two reasons: the arbitrary and cruel treatment that the military inflicted on its own officers and soldiers, and the hierarchical nature of Japanese society, in which status was dictated by proximity to the emperor. Before the invasion of Nanking, the Japanese military had subjected its own soldiers to endless humiliation. Japanese soldiers were forced to wash the underwear of officers or stand meekly while superiors slapped them until they streamed with blood. Using Orwellian language, the routine striking of Japanese soldiers, or *bentatsu*, was termed an "act of love" by the officers, and the violent discipline of the Japanese navy through *tekken seisai*, or "the iron fist," was often called *ai-no-muchi*, or "whip of love."

It has often been suggested that those with the least power are often the most sadistic if given the power of life and death over people even lower on the pecking order, and the rage engendered by this rigid pecking order was suddenly given an outlet when Japanese soldiers went abroad. In foreign lands or colonized territories, the Japanese soldiers—representatives of the emperor—enjoyed tremendous power among the subjects. In China even the lowliest Japanese private was considered superior to the most powerful and distinguished native, and it is easy to see how years of suppressed anger, hatred, and fear of

authority could have erupted in uncontrollable violence at Nanking. The Japanese soldier had endured in silence whatever his superiors had chosen to deal out to him, and now the Chinese had to take whatever he chose to deal out to them.

A second factor in the atrocities, scholars believe, is the virulent contempt that many in the Japanese military reserved for Chinese people—a contempt cultivated by decades of propaganda, education, and social indoctrination. Though the Japanese and the Chinese share similar if not identical racial features (which in a distorted way may have threatened the Japanese vision of themselves as unique), there were those in the imperial army who saw the Chinese as subhuman beings whose murder would carry no greater moral weight than squashing a bug or butchering a hog. In fact, both before and during the war members of the Japanese military at all levels frequently compared the Chinese to pigs. For example, a Japanese general told a correspondent: "To be frank, your view of Chinese is totally different from mine. You regard the Chinese as human beings while I regard the Chinese as pigs." A Japanese officer in Nanking who bound Chinese captives together in groups of ten, pushed each group into a pit, and burned them excused his actions by explaining that his feelings when committing these murders were identical to those he had when he slaughtered pigs. In 1938 the Japanese soldier Azuma Shiro confided in his diary at Nanking that "a pig is more valuable now than the life of a [Chinese] human being. That's because a pig is edible."

A third factor was religion. Imbuing violence with holy meaning, the Japanese imperial army made violence a cultural imperative every bit as powerful as that which propelled Europeans during the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. "Every single bullet must be charged with the Imperial Way, and the end of every bayonet must have the National Virtue burnt into it," one Japanese general declared in a speech in 1933.

Few Japanese doubted the righteousness of their mission in China. Nagatomi Hakudo, a former Japanese soldier who participated in the Rape of Nanking, said he had been reared to believe that the emperor was the natural ruler of the world,

that the Japanese were racially superior to the rest of the world, and that it was the destiny of Japan to control Asia. When a local Christian priest asked him, "Who is greater, God or the emperor of Japan?" he had no doubt that "the emperor" was the correct answer.

With an entity higher than God on its side, it was not difficult for the Japanese military to take the next step—adopting the belief that the war, even the violence that came with it, would ultimately benefit not only Japan but its victims as well. Some perceived atrocity as a necessary tool to achieve a Japanese victory that would serve all and help create a better China under Japan's "Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere." This attitude echoes that of the Japanese teachers and officers who beat their students and soldiers senseless while insisting, between blows, that it was all done for their own good.

Perhaps it was General Matsui Iwane who summed up the prevailing mentality of self-delusion best when he attempted to justify Japanese oppression of China. Before he left for Shanghai in 1937, he told his supporters: "I am going to the front not to fight an enemy but in the state of mind of one who sets out to pacify his brother." Later he would say of the invasion of China:

The struggle between Japan and China was always a fight between brothers within the "Asian Family." . . . It had been my belief during all these days that we must regard this struggle as a method of making the Chinese undergo self reflection. We do not do this because we hate them, but on the contrary *we love them too much*. It is just the same as in a family when an elder brother has taken all that he can stand from his ill-behaved younger brother and has to chastise him in order to make him behave properly.

Whatever the course of postwar history, the Rape of Nanking will stand as a blemish upon the honor of human beings. But what makes the blemish particularly repugnant is that history has never written a proper end for the story. Even in 1997, the

Japanese as a nation are still trying to bury the victims of Nanking—not under the soil, as in 1937, but into historical oblivion. In a disgraceful compounding of the offense, the story of the Nanking massacre is barely known in the West because so few people have tried to document and narrate it systematically to the public.

This book started out as an attempt to rescue those victims from more degradation by Japanese revisionists and to provide my own epitaph for the hundreds upon thousands of unmarked graves in Nanking. It ended as a personal exploration into the shadow side of human nature. There are several important lessons to be learned from Nanking, and one is that civilization itself is tissue-thin. There are those who believe that the Japanese are uniquely sinister—a dangerous race of people who will never change. But after reading several file cabinets' worth of documents on Japanese war crimes as well as accounts of ancient atrocities from the pantheon of world history, I would have to conclude that Japan's behavior during World War II was less a product of dangerous people than of a dangerous government, in a vulnerable culture, in dangerous times, able to sell dangerous rationalizations to those whose human instincts told them otherwise. The Rape of Nanking should be perceived as a cautionary tale—an illustration of how easily human beings can be encouraged to allow their teenagers to be molded into efficient killing machines able to suppress their better natures.

Another lesson to be gleaned from Nanking is the role of power in genocide. Those who have studied the patterns of large-scale killings throughout history have noted that the sheer concentration of power in government is lethal—that only a sense of absolute unchecked power can make atrocities like the Rape of Nanking possible. In the 1990s R. J. Rummel, perhaps the world's greatest authority on *democide* (a term he coined to include both genocide and government mass murder), completed a systematic and quantitative study of atrocities in both the twentieth century and ancient times, an impressive body of research that he summed up with a play on the famous Lord Acton line: "Power kills, and absolute power kills absolutely." The

less restraint on power within a government, Rummel found, the more likely that government will act on the whims or psychologically generated darker impulses of its leaders to wage war on foreign governments. Japan was no exception, and atrocities such as the Rape of Nanking can be seen as a predictable if not inevitable outgrowth of ceding to an authoritarian regime, dominated by a military and imperial elite, the unchallenged power to commit an entire people to realizing the sick goals of the few with the unbridled power to set them.

And there is yet a third lesson to be learned, one that is perhaps the most distressing of all. It lies in the frightening ease with which the mind can accept genocide, turning us all into passive spectators to the unthinkable. The Rape of Nanking was front-page news across the world, and yet most of the world stood by and did nothing while an entire city was butchered. The international response to the Nanking atrocities was eerily akin to the more recent response to the atrocities in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda: while thousands have died almost unbelievably cruel deaths, the entire world has watched CNN and wrung its hands. One could argue that the United States and other countries failed to intervene earlier to prevent the Nazis from carrying out their "final solution" because the genocide was carried out in wartime secrecy and with such cold efficiency that until Allied soldiers liberated the camps and saw with their own eyes the extent of the horror, most people could not accept the reports they had been getting as literally true. But for the Rape of Nanking, or for the murders in the former Yugoslavia, there can be no such excuse. The Nanking atrocities were splashed prominently across the pages of newspapers like the *New York Times*, while the Bosnia outrages were played out daily on television in virtually every living room. Apparently some quirk in human nature allows even the most unspeakable acts of evil to become banal within minutes, provided only that they occur far enough away to pose no personal threat.

Sad to say, the world is still acting as a passive spectator to the second Japanese rape—the refusal of the Japanese to apologize for or even acknowledge their crimes at Nanking, and the

attempts by Japanese extremists to erase the event from world history. To get a better handle on the magnitude of the injustice, one only has to compare the postwar restitution that the governments of Japan and Germany have made to their wartime victims. While it is certainly true that money alone cannot give back to murder victims their lost lives or erase from memory the tortures the survivors endured, it can at least convey that what was done to the victims represented the evil of others.

As of 1997 the German government has paid at least DM 88 billion in compensation and reparations and will pay another DM 20 billion by the year 2005. If one factors in all the money the Germans have paid in compensation to individual victims, restitution for lost property, compensatory pensions, payments based on state regulations, final restitution in special cases, and money for global agreements with Israel and sixteen other nations for war damages, the total comes to almost DM 124 billion, or almost \$60 billion. The Japanese have paid close to nothing for their wartime crimes. In an era when even the Swiss have pledged billions of dollars to create a fund to replace what was stolen from Jewish bank accounts, many leading officials in Japan continue to believe (or pretend to believe) that their country did nothing that requires compensation, or even apologies, and contend that many of the worst misdeeds their government has been accused of perpetrating never happened and that evidence that they did happen was fabricated by the Chinese and other Japan bashers.

The Japanese government has taken the position that all wartime reparation issues were resolved by the 1952 San Francisco Peace Treaty. A close reading of the treaty, however, reveals that the issue was merely postponed until Japan was in a better financial situation. "It is recognized that Japan should pay reparations to the Allied Powers," the treaty states in chapter 5, article 14. "Nevertheless it is also recognized that the resources of Japan are not presently sufficient, if it is to maintain a viable economy, to make complete reparations for all such damage and suffering and at the same time meet its other obligations."

One of the greatest ironies of the cold war is that Japan not only eluded its responsibility to pay reparations but received billions of dollars in aid from the United States, which helped build its former enemy into an economic powerhouse and competitor. Now there is considerable concern in Asia about the prospect of renewed militarism among the Japanese people. During the Reagan administration the United States pushed Japan to beef up its military power—something that alarmed many who had suffered years of Japanese wartime aggression. “Those who ignore history tend to become its victims,” warned Carlos Romulo, the Philippine foreign minister and Pulitzer Prize winner who served as General Douglas MacArthur’s aide-de-camp during World War II and understood the competitive national spirit engendered by the Japanese culture. “The Japanese are a very determined people; they have brains. At the end of World War II, no one thought that Japan would become the foremost economic power in the world—but they are. If you give them the chance to become a military power—they will become a military power.”

But the cold war has ended, China is fast emerging from the chrysalis of communism, and other Asian nations that were bullied by Japan during the war may challenge it as they grow ascendant in the international economic arena. The next few years may well witness giant strides in activism regarding Japanese wartime crimes. The American public is growing demographically more Asian. And unlike their parents, whose careers were heavily concentrated in scientific fields, the younger generations of Chinese Americans and Chinese Canadians are fast gaining influence in law, politics, and journalism—professions historically underrepresented by Asians in North America.

Public awareness of the Nanking massacre increased substantially between the time I first started to research this book and the time I finished it. The 1990s saw a proliferation of novels, historical books, and newspaper articles about the Rape of Nanking, the comfort women, Japanese medical experimentation on wartime victims, and other Japanese World War II atrocities. As of 1997 the San Francisco school district plans to include the history of the Rape of Nanking in its curriculum,

and blueprints have even been drawn up among Chinese real estate developers to build a Chinese holocaust museum.

As this book neared completion, the U.S. government was starting to respond to activist demands to pressure the Japanese to confront their wartime past. On December 3, 1996, the Department of Justice established a watch list of Japanese war criminals in order to bar them from entering the country. In April 1997, former U.S. Ambassador Walter Mondale told the press that Japan needs to face history honestly and directly and expressed his wish that Japan make a full apology for its war crimes. The Rape of Nanking even made its way into a bill that will soon be introduced into the U.S. House of Representatives. Through the spring of 1997, legislators worked with human rights activists to draft a bill that will condemn Japan for the maltreatment of U.S. and other prisoners during World War II and demand an official apology and compensation for its wartime victims.

The movement to force the Japanese government to face the full truth about the legacy of its wartime government is gaining support even in Japan, where official denials of wartime atrocities have aroused considerable shame and embarrassment among those citizens who see themselves as more than simply and solely Japanese. A vocal minority is convinced that their government must acknowledge its past if it expects to command trust from its neighbors in the future. In 1997 the Japanese Fellowship of Reconciliation released the following statement:

In the past war, Japan was arrogant and pompous, behaved as aggressors in other Asian countries and brought misery to a great number of people, especially in China. For fifteen years around the 1930s, Japan continued to make war against the Chinese. War actions continued and victimized tens of millions of people. Here, we sincerely would like to apologize for Japan's past mistakes and beg your forgiveness.

The present generation in Japan faces a critical choice. They can continue to delude themselves that the war of Japanese aggression was a holy and just war that Japan happened to lose

solely because of American economic power, or they can make a clean break from their nation's legacy of horror by acknowledging the truth: that the world is a better place because Japan lost the war and was not able to impose its harsh "love" on more people than it did. If modern Japanese do nothing to protect the truth, they run the risk that history will leave them as tarnished as their wartime ancestors.

Japan carries not only the legal burden but the moral obligation to acknowledge the evil it perpetrated at Nanking. At a minimum, the Japanese government needs to issue an official apology to the victims, pay reparations to the people whose lives were destroyed in the rampage, and, most important, educate future generations of Japanese citizens about the true facts of the massacre. These long-overdue steps are crucial for Japan if it expects to deserve respect from the international community—and to achieve closure on a dark chapter that stained its history.