

## Reshaping the Memory of the Nanjing Massacre: Second Language Learning as Intercultural Education

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**Abstract:** This article contributes to breaking down the barriers between second language learners in China and Japan that have exacerbated the differences in historic interpretations of the Nanjing Massacre. It suggests that their dialogue helps students to identify multiplicity of the memory of the massacre and relative self-culture to make trans-culture possible.

**Keywords:** Intercultural Education, Anthropology of education, Public anthropology, Second language learnings, Historic interpretation, Memory, the Nanjing Massacre, Museum.

### Introduction

This article focuses the memory of the Nanjing Massacre, which builds physical and psychological barriers between second language learners in China and Japan<sup>2</sup>. This historic event is interpreted through various factors, including nationality, generation, and political orientation. Although it is an oversimplification to attribute those interpretations simply to national borders, the claims by Japanese massacre deniers have worsened relations with China, and conversely, the image of an aggressive anti-Japan movement in China has hardened positions in Japan. This attitude has made second language learning less productive.

To solve the problem, it would be useful for learners of both languages to communicate with each other. This research project conducted a meeting of learners of both languages, followed by a field trip to the Nanjing Massacre Memorial in Nanjing, China. The reason why we visited the museum is that 1) exhibits provide information from pictures and video that is valuable even for students with limited language skills; and 2) exhibits can direct students to a sympathetic view of the historic event. During the discussion, I encouraged students to define our social backgrounds by exploring multiple historical interpretations of the Massacre and review each cultural value.

This research contributes to intercultural education, which investigates issues in multicultural situations (Ebuchi 1994). Sato criticized the notion that the structural-functionalism approach tends to direct the stereotypical “pre-established” conclusion (Sato 2010: 23-24). This indicated that researchers should focus on the multiplicity of inter-culture, along with their confrontation and conflict (Sato 2010:37). This is a useful suggestion for educators who explore a historical perception of a historic event such as the Nanjing Massacre. In this paper, we remind ourselves that interpretations are generated by multiple causes, and those interpretations are influenced by socio-cultural background. To create a productive dialogue between two language learner

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<sup>2</sup> Sturken distinguishes between cultural memory, personal memory, and official historical discourse and defines that cultural memory “is shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meaning” (Sturken 1996:3). I use “memory” to refer to “cultural memory” in this paper.

groups, this research is intended to reshape the memory of the Nanjing Massacre by exploring multiple historic views.

This research explores both the anthropology of education and public anthropology. Sato indicated that ethnography, which is the main approach of the anthropology of education, is not enough to change intercultural relationships (Sato 2010:34). Public anthropology plays a key role here. In 2009, we discussed the sphere of the public anthropology in the anthropology of education<sup>3</sup>. Educational research involves both theory and highly pragmatic issues. Sato explains that when you conduct research on intercultural education, it is important to pursue the benefit for the object of the research (Sato 2010:3). This is also true with public anthropology. The purpose of this paper is to improve cultural understanding by second language learners of Chinese and Japanese. Although to discuss the theoretical issue is beyond the scope of a brief paper, I will analyze whether or not an interdisciplinary approach would work in dealing with current issues.

## I. Historic perception problem between China and Japan

Nanjing is located three hundred kilometers inland from Shanghai. This city was the capital of China several times, including most recently under the Republic of China. When the Sino-Japan War started in 1937, the Japanese Army landed in Shanghai and marched to Nanjing. On December 13, 1937, the Japanese Army broke through a gate into Nanjing city. Japanese soldiers committed executions, rapes, theft, and arson until January of 1938. This tragedy is called the Nanjing Atrocities, the Nanjing Massacre, or the Rape of Nanking. This historic event has been a scar of the war for many decades.

Every year on the anniversary day, an air-raid siren goes off at mid-morning. The sirens switch to other locations, continuing for about an hour. The Nanjing Massacre Memorial conducts a memorial service for the war dead at an open space called the mourning plaza. At the first part of the ceremony, Chinese monks recite a sutra, and then Japanese monks take over the ceremony. Joining the service are residents of Nanjing, sightseeing tours from around the country, school groups, and a war memorial tour from Japan. The museum is wildly crowded throughout the day, with almost no chance for visitors to look at the exhibits. Even though visitors are just walking through the exhibit rooms, some women start crying at front of the brutal pictures. From time to time, Chinese monks chanting a sutra walk through the exhibit rooms.

Japanese who live in Nanjing must deal with this tragic event not only on the anniversary day but also in everyday life. Some careful people tell Japanese “it is already over,” but some other people, often storekeepers and taxi drivers when they provide service to Japanese, say “aren’t you ashamed to be here?” The memory of the Nanjing Massacre is still recalled by Nanjing residents.

Even more than seventy years after the Nanjing Massacre, there are many disagreements with what happened in the city. The differences are particularly pronounced for those from different countries, generations, or political orientations. The interpretations of the Nanjing Massacre have varied along with the world political situation (Yoshida 2006). In Japan, the controversy was fueled by a 1971 report in the *Asahi Shinbun* (newspaper) by Katsuichi Honda<sup>4</sup>. This report, which included a story

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<sup>3</sup> This issue was discussed at the panel: Anthropology of Education —An Alternative Perspective— (Chair: Mariko Fujita). The 43rd Annual Meeting of the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology.

<sup>4</sup> He published the report in 1971. In addition he covered the story in 1984 and published it in 1987.

of a “killing contest” during the war, was criticized by several opponents<sup>5</sup>. This controversy contextualized the affirmatives and denials for writers, journalists, professors, and historians<sup>6</sup>. As the controversy grew, the number of publications also increased: scholarly work (Kasahara 2006, Fujiwara 1997), reportorial pieces (Honda 1972; 1987), nonfiction (Kasahara 1995, Suzuki 2006, Tanaka 1984, Higashinakano 1998), and dailies (Azuma 1987), including works from overseas (Buruma 1994, Chang 1997, Vautrin 1999, Rabe 2000, Fogel 2000; 2007, Yang 2000; 2006a, b). The dispute became fierce from late 1990 on, through internet and textbook controversies. Modern Japanese split greatly, with their historical opinions affected significantly by their political orientation, ranging from left wing to right wing. Both sides sometimes came close to destroying free speech for the other side.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology gives official approval to textbooks in Japan. In 2001, the New History Textbook written by The Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform passed the screening. The Society was founded in 1996 to develop a textbook to free children from “a masochistic view of history” in teaching about the Nanjing Massacre and comfort women, and to educate them to be able to have confidence and responsibility as Japanese (The Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, ed.1997). This textbook was highly criticized by South Korea and China. Many civic groups and academic associations in Japan also mounted a campaign against their ethnocentric historic view. As a result, the rate of choosing the textbook entire Japan was 0.039% in 2001, 0.4% in 2006.

Chinese students use government-designated textbooks. The textbook for elementary school shows a photograph of a Japanese soldier about to use his sword to kill a Chinese (Chinese elementary school textbook-history 2000). The junior high school textbook describes several cases of mass murder (Chinese junior high school textbook-history 2001). Both textbooks include accounts of the Japanese Army killing soldiers who surrendered, along with civilians, indicating that the number of victims was more than three hundred thousand. This is considerably different from Japanese textbooks, which usually describe the Massacre only in a couple sentences. Those different approaches would encourage students in Japan and China to develop different memories of the Nanjing Massacre, causing conflict between two nations.

According to The Genron NPO survey<sup>7</sup>, the negative image of China in Japan is rapidly increasing: from 36.4 % in 2006 to 66.3% in 2007, increasing to 75.6% in 2008, and rising into 90.1% in 2013. The negative image of Japan in China is increasing as well: after falling from 56.9% in 2006 to 36.5% in 2007, it increased to

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<sup>5</sup> This is the contest between two Japanese Lieutenants competing to see which one could kill one hundred Chinese first by sword while on the march from Shanghai to Nanjing. This contest was originally reported by Japanese newspapers in 1937. Both Lieutenants were convicted in the Nanjing Trial and executed at Yuhuatai, just south of the south gate (Zhong hua men) of the city wall in 1948. There is a dispute in Japan over the accuracy of this story. In 2003, both bereaved families filed a lawsuit against the newspaper company, publisher, and an author who wrote about the contest at the newspaper in 1971 (later published as a book). The case was rejected in 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Strictly speaking, there are several opinions in the affirmative, along with several denials. The primary issue is the number of victims at the Massacre. Although Chinese historians support 300,000 or more, some Japanese historians believe that a more accurate number would be 100,000 to 200,000. Some other Japanese historians argue for even lower estimates--between 40,000 and 120,000. Some extremists deny the incident.

<sup>7</sup> The Genron NPO is a not-for-profit think tank in Japan, established in 2001 out of a belief that the establishment of a sound civil society requires a venue for serious and responsible future-oriented policy debate by those with a strong sense of being stakeholders. <http://www.genron-npo.net/en/aboutus/> last access 3/30/2015.

65.2% in 2009, and then it rose to 92.8% in 2013<sup>8</sup>. This indicates that there is a problem between these countries that is not just serious but becoming worse.

When I conducted this research in 2006, the question “Which is most important historic problem to solve?” generated different opinions from each country<sup>9</sup>. In Japan, 54.9% listed the Prime minister’s Yasukuni Shrine visit and “46.2% named “Chinese education and textbook content.” In China, 66.3% identified issue of the Nanjing Massacre” and 57.7% listed Japanese historic textbooks. How different were the interpretations of historic event between two countries in their educational systems? How did those interpretations influence students? How could we encourage those groups to begin a reasonable dialogue? While I was teaching Japanese language at Nanjing University 2005 and 2006, I interviewed both Chinese and Japanese students along with the project I will describe next.

## **II. Creating a dialogue between students in China and Japan**

I started this research project while I was teaching Japanese in Nanjing University. I realized that Chinese students in the Department of Japanese rarely have an opportunity to have Japanese friends, even though there are many Japanese abroad students at the University. I asked the Japanese students if they were interested in making contact with Chinese students. During this process, I conducted interviews with both Chinese and Japanese students about the problem of historic awareness between China and Japan, and about the Nanjing Massacre. I found both Chinese and Japanese students are always interested in other students’ opinion of the Massacre, yet the issue is too sensitive to bring up.

Japanese students know that they need to face the issue while they are in Nanjing. However they feel still unprepared to discuss it. Criticism in everyday life exhausted younger students, who do not want to even talk about the issue. There is wide range of generations among Japanese students. Some students are returning students; some came to the University after retirement. Their experiences in life are quite different from those of younger students. One student was in colonial northern China while she was little. When the war was over, the anti-Japanese movement developed, so that she felt threatened. Other students in their 50s believe that their teachers did not tell them about the Massacre in the history classes that they took when they were in school. Those students are very motivated to change the present Japanese situation.

Chinese students entered the university from throughout mainland China. Even though their families were not in Nanjing during the Massacre, their family members struggled with the Japanese invasion in their home towns. They learned the living history from families and relatives, and in addition, they learned quite a lot in history classes. This resulted in different attitudes from those of the younger Japanese students. Chinese students know very well the news their Government reported about the prime minister’s visit to the Yasukuni shrine and the history textbook issue. They do not understand why the Japanese deny the number of the victims of the Massacre, so that they are very interested in Japanese students’ opinion.

I was concerned with representation of the Massacre by media, textbooks, and especially museum exhibits. Chinese students are educated by the beliefs of “truth of history”, as are many Japanese students. This idea causes the historic awareness

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<sup>8</sup> [http://tokyo-beijingforum.net/index.php/survey/2014\\_10th](http://tokyo-beijingforum.net/index.php/survey/2014_10th) last access 3/30/2015.

<sup>9</sup> <http://tokyo-beijingforum.net/index.php/survey/2nd-survey> last access 3/30/2015.

problem between the countries. This is the reason why I planned the discussion of the historical interpretation of the Nanjing Massacre.

On May 13, 2006, I organized a discussion on the issue of historical interpretation, along with a field trip to The Nanjing Massacre Museum. Participants were mostly students at Nanjing University, including Chinese undergraduate students majoring in Japanese language, Japanese students majoring in Chinese language, and undergraduate and graduate students from U.S universities. The U.S. students were Japanese, Japanese Americans, and child from the mixed marriage. On the morning of the field trip, we introduced ourselves, and I explained the point of view of the exhibits at the Nanjing University. Then we travelled to the museum and visited the exhibits during the morning. We came back to the university, had lunch together, and then we had a discussion in the afternoon.

Established by the Nanjing City government in 1985, The Nanjing Massacre Museum is located just outside of the southwest side of city wall, which is the one of the execution grounds and mass burial sites throughout Nanjing. They opened the exhibit in 1995, including three memorial squares, open-air exhibits of victims' remains, and the exhibition hall. The museum expanded and was restored in 2007 to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Massacre.

At the museum, we walked through all of the exhibit rooms together<sup>10</sup>. Most Japanese students had come the museum already, because their Chinese language program at Nanjing University offered a field trip to the museum every year. In contrast to those Japanese students, Chinese students who came from their hometowns outside Nanjing had never come to see the exhibits previously. Some students who grew up in Nanjing had visited the museum yearly during field trips.

Memorial squares include the mourning plaza, the funeral plaza, and the graveyard plaza. The mourning plaza is a wide open space where the memorial ceremony is held annually on the anniversary. It includes monuments showing the number of victims, which is three hundred thousand. The mourning plaza put copperplates of survivors' footprints on the ground; these are called survivors testimony. It also has the memorial statue of Iris Chang, who published her bestseller "The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War" on 1997, and unfortunately committed suicide in 2004. The funeral plaza is covered with white egg shape stones representing the war dead. A curved wall showing cruel acts of the Japanese Army, along with a list of some of the victims surrounds the plaza.

The open-air exhibits of victims' remains are very powerful. At the half-underground exhibit area, you can see the buried human skulls and bones in a plastic case. It tells that victims' remains are buried in the entire ground of the funeral plaza. The other exhibit is a preservation of the excavation of victims' remains, including females and little children. Exhibit labels tell you how they were murdered.

The exhibition hall lies half buried in the ground, shaped like a tomb. The hall includes photographs, documents, maps, charts, and some objects. There are six corners, including: 1. Japanese Army Invaded Nanjing, and Nanjing Fell, 2. Nanjing Invasion, 3. The Massacre, 4. Resistance and Victory, 5. Historical Judgments, and 6. Historical Verifications. "Japanese Army Invaded Nanjing and Nanjing Fell" shows the Japanese Army destroying cities and towns on the march from Shanghai to Nanjing. "Nanjing Invasion" displays historical pictures, maps, and Japanese newspapers telling their army's success story. "The Massacre" is the main part of this Hall. It shows the cruelty of the Japanese Army. Picture and survivors' testimony shows that Japanese soldiers executed prisoners of war and civilians, including women

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<sup>10</sup> This observation was conducted in 2005-2006. The exhibits were remodeled in 2007.

and children. They were buried alive, stabbed, chopped by Katana sword, shot, raped, robbed, and burned, along with their property. The other photographs show a “contest for killing 100”, known as the murder game in China.

Exhibits also show the contribution of the International Safety Zone developed by Westerners. Japanese Army buried victims’ bodies in the ground and threw them in the Yangtzu River. Several charitable organizations also buried bodies. “Resistance and Victory” shows that the Chinese people made incredible sacrifices for anti-fascism in fighting with Japan. “Historical Judgments” is about the Tokyo trial and the Nanjing trial. “Historical verifications” include testimony of survivors, member of the International Safety Zone, and Japanese veterans. In conclusion, they show several photographs not only of Chinese politicians but also of Japanese politicians visiting the museum. Their last message is “Remember the past and it will guide your future.”

While we were there, an oppressive atmosphere hung over us. The Chinese and Japanese students mostly stayed in separate groups. Both Chinese and Japanese students stared at those merciless pictures. The Japanese students sometimes murmured to their friends, making guarded comments. Although Chinese visitors in general tended to express their thoughts and emotions openly and forcefully, my students expressed their feelings for the victims quietly and gently. I could see the tension between the two groups.

Following the field trip, we had a discussion at Nanjing University. Although many Japanese students were still in the Chinese language course, the Chinese students are already juniors, and their language skills were excellent. We use Japanese for the main language during the discussion, along with a Chinese graduate student as an interpreter. I served as the facilitator. We examined historic perception by discussing the exhibits. Then by comparing historic perception among our group, we confirmed that there are various historic interpretations of the Nanjing Massacre, depending on the backgrounds of the discussants. Finally, we considered the museum’s underlying message.

At first, we discussed the museum’s historic perception, along with an analysis of the exhibits. Participants took notice of photographs, reproductions, and expression of cruelty. There are many photographs of the moment of slaughter and the remains on display. Some Japanese and U.S. students expressed that those were grotesque. A Chinese student told her experience in the childhood that she had a nightmare the night she went the museum at first. The U.S. students indicated that the effect of the wall with dark color, along with a spotlight in the dark exhibit hall was to frighten visitors. Although these students interpreted photographs as a medium of expression, others saw them as evidence of what happened in Nanjing. There were a few artifacts in the displays; many were reproductions. A U.S. student asked why the museum needed to show a cloth with blood and a Japanese sword, raising the possibility that this causes the museum to lose credibility in its exhibit. Most participants agreed that the expression of cruelty on display was striking, but there were different interpretations of that expression among participants. Chinese students and some Japanese students thought the expression was evidence that the historic event was not just an incident but massacre. Some other Japanese students and U.S. students thought that there is a hidden message the museum is trying to tell you.

Next, we compared between existing knowledge of students and the museum exhibits. The biggest problem here was with regard to the number of victims, which was three hundred thousand. Chinese students asked Japanese students why Japanese deny the number. A younger student answered that there are too much conflicting information about it in Japan and honestly he could not decide what is true. The elder Japanese students were uncomfortable with that response, stating that because it was

the Japanese who invaded China, it inappropriate for the Japanese to question the accuracy of the number of victims. There were two conflicting views among participants that were not related to nationality: the number is a symbol of cruelty so that it is unproductive to bother, and the number is necessary to describe the cruelty. A Japanese student indicated that when the Chinese government was unwilling to deemphasize the specific number, this allowed the groups that underestimate the Massacre to criticize the number, rather than the more important issue of the massacre itself. Another Japanese student asked why the museum had internationally stressed the number, which mainly served to arouse antipathy by Japanese deniers. A U.S. student indicated that when the museum uses the number as a symbol of the Massacre, it seems to distract from the primary mission, which is the horror of the Massacre itself.

Finally, we analyzed the museum's underlying message. A U.S. student focused on an explanation label at the end of the exhibit stating that the exhibits strengthen socialism, strengthen patriotism, unify the nation, and promote international peace. He raised a question regarding how socialism is related to the Massacre, and why the museum displayed that message. A Chinese student answered that the Chinese rationale is that China had been invaded because of weakness, and that socialism made China strong and brought peace. The U.S. student said that it seems impossible to value socialism and commemorate the Massacre for the purpose of being accepted internationally. A Chinese student disagreed with this, insisting that changing the exhibit just to conform to other countries is questionable. The other U.S. students argued that the museum's mission should be to protect the memory of a catastrophic historical event without using it for political propaganda.

### **III. The memory of the Nanjing Massacre**

We closed this discussion open-ended. I distributed a questionnaire to participants immediately after the discussion, and I interviewed some participants later. I obtained the following results.

First, expressing one's own opinion in person was helpful in developing a relationship of mutual trust. Chinese and Japanese students hardly knew each other, and the topic of the Nanjing Massacre was too sensitive. The media in China report the conservative position in Japan, not the opposing view. Chinese students appreciated learning that there is a whole range of political/ideological orientation among Japanese.

Second, students tend not to pay attention to various aspects of historic events. For instance, Chinese students and some Japanese students were interested in how the museum persuades visitors that the Japanese should apologize. Originally those students had thought that criticizing the exhibits was unfair. After this discussion, some of those students told me that "I had believed the exhibit was absolute, but now I understood there were possibilities that it is not so," or "I learned the point of view of reviewing museums as social education institutes."

Third, students learned others' perspectives. Chinese and some of Japanese students tend to see history truth/untruth. When you see the exhibits, it is difficult to recognize that exhibit scenario is based on victims/assailant, which are good/evil. History is not that simple. In addition, U.S. students found a hidden message in the exhibit, which was because they seemed familiar with anti-communism ideology in the U.S. The issue of ideology in museum exhibits that was raised by U.S. students had encouraged Chinese and Japanese students to review their existing historical interpretation through U.S. students' social-cultural background.

As the result, students gradually broke the ice and discussed the sensitive issues. They began to question their previously-held beliefs, while developing historical literacy by reviewing the exhibits so that they could understand diverse historical interpretations. Does this mean that students managed to reshape their memory of the Nanjing Massacre?

The memory of the Nanjing Massacre in China had been developed mainly through national standards of education, including history textbooks, history classes, and field trips, along with oral history from the family members in China. In Japan, that memory depends on the generation; some students learned more than other generations with liberal historic view, so that some students are very sympathetic and feel guilty, but other generations even cannot develop own view, because of lack of knowledge and sense of reality. In both cases, the memory was created by their own governments, rather than by local peoples. That is the reason why each country's stories were simplified. During this discussion, whether they agreed or not, students were exposed to multiple views of the historic event. Exposure to other's historic interpretations affects one's own historic perception, as long as the mind is not closed. Reshaping the memory of the Nanjing Massacre helped those second language learners to distance themselves from their own socio-cultural backgrounds and improve their learning of the target language.

## Conclusion

This paper explored historical perceptions of second language learners such as Chinese students learning Japanese and Japanese students learning Chinese. In the case of students at Nanjing University, historic interpretation of the Nanjing Massacre is a major barrier. To reduce this barrier, I created a dialogue starting with a field trip to the Nanjing Massacre Memorial, followed by a discussion of the experience.

Visiting the museum helped various students, especially beginning students, to understand issues not only by text but also by pictures and artifacts. Becoming aware of other groups' comments and reactions to those exhibits led to sympathetic attitudes as well. This encouraged students to learn others' points of view.

During the discussion, both students' groups discovered others' historic interpretations. Even in a group, we found different historic perception along generational lines. Also students from the U.S., even though most of them were Japanese or of Japanese descent, made points from an outsider's point of view. It was an opportunity for all participants to reflect on their own socio-cultural backgrounds. This dialogue helped students identify multiplicity of the memory of the massacre, encouraging them to speak up freely.

Is the project to make it happen trans-culture? I would say that it is fair at the grass-roots level, but more work needs to be done for future generations. Not only the historic perception problem, but the territory problem has been a serious issue between China and Japan recently. This type of project should continue the discussion regarding the complexity of those historic interceptions<sup>11</sup>. The fields of education of anthropology, public anthropology, and inter-culture education overlap; this interdisciplinary approach improves the flow of information and promotes advances in research.

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<sup>11</sup> I conducted a follow-up session with Chinese students at Nanjing University. The students and I discussed improvement of exhibits along with my presentation about the Nanjing Massacre exhibits in Japanese museums.



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