

The Nanjing Massacre- the outline of issues.

Karolina Baraniak

PhD candidate University of Wrocław (Poland)

karolinabaraniak@interia.pl

Abstract: *On December 13, 1937, shortly after the Japanese siege, the capital of the Republic of Nanjing fell, becoming the scene of a macabre massacre. The subordinates of general Matsui Iwane murdered, shot and burned about 200-400 thousand people and indulged in indescribable rape in women...¹- even such laconic information in individual publications is scary with the scale of violence that a person can do to another person.*

Keywords: Nankin, China, Japan.

In early December 1937. the Japanese army, after the capitulation of Shanghai From November 11, 1937, reached the suburbs of the Republic of China. On December 9, in Nanjing, flyers appeared, with which General Matusi Iwane preached: „[...] *to be raw and ruthless to resist, but kind and generous to non-fighting and Chinese soldiers who will not take hostile steps towards Japan [...]*”². According to documents distributed in the city, the

capitulation should be made before the next day, Otherwise, „[...] *the Japanese will open the doors to all the horrors of war [...]*”³.

Main defender of Nanjing, general Tang Sheng-chi, publicly disregarded the ultimatum, but secretly, with help from the foreigners, who were in the city, tried to negotiate a truce. Therefore, this plan failed, so Japanese heavy artillery and bombs came into the picture, which had such a negative impact on the Chinese commander that he had issued a retreat order, hereupon on the night of 11/12 December he fled to the other side of the river to city Pukou, occupied gradually by the Japanese⁴. The raids of the Japanese occupiers ruined the bridges, the last rescue planes. In the darkness, illuminated here and there by the burning ammunition, near the Ichang gate- the most important evacuation artery- had scenes like in Dante's "Divine Comedy"⁵.

According to sources, the terrifying events in Nanjing came as a result of the encouragement of local commanders who went to breach the orders of the general responsible for the entire operation of seizing

¹ J. Polit, *Chiny*, Wydawnictwo TRIO, Warszawa 2004, p.158.

² J. Polit, *Smutny kontynent. Z dziejów Azji Wschodniej w XX wieku*, Wydawnictwo Arcana Kraków 2002, p.33.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Ibidem.

the city by the Japanese troops. General Iwane issued the command to enter the Chinese capital with only a few disciplined battalions⁶. Their duty was to subdue the Chinese capital in such a way that „[...] the army should shine in the eyes of the Chinese and should give them confidence in Japan [...]”⁷. Wounded, he called staff officers and said to them: „[...] *The entry of the Imperial Army to a foreign capital is a great event in our history [...] focusing on the attention of the world. Hence no branch can enter the city in a disorderly way [...] One must inform them in advance of the things they need to keep in mind and keep the status of alien rights and interests within the city limits. They cannot under any circumstances steal. If necessary, the guards should be established. The robbery and burning, even if it is done by rashness, must be severely punished. Together with the army within the city should find the gendarmerie and its auxiliary services that will protect against the lawlessness [...]*”⁸.

Matsuo was then promoted to general commander of the whole of the Central War theater, and his successor as the commander of one of the three large columns entering Nanjing was the relative of Emperor Hirohito, Prince Asaka Yasuhiko. As a member of the ruling family, he was able to give himself a

special freedom of action. His acquaintance with the other two commanders, formed during their joint stay in Paris as intelligence officers, favored joint activities⁹.

Under conditions of presence nearly 300 thousand Chinese soldiers in Nanjing, there was no doubt about the fast surrender, as well as the insufficient food for the captives and too little Japanese forces to keep the Chinese military prisoners in check and to inhibit retaliatory actions, so on December 13 the Asaka's command decided to kill all captives.

Extermination of all Chinese military has become the beginning of a crime, that has transformed into a general rape, and in many situations the murder of women or children¹⁰.

Many Chinese Republican soldiers, often abandoned by their deserterizing officers who did not want or could not break out of the encirclement, mercilessly were chased and massacred, both in the fires of the fighting and for days and weeks, few survived this hell. Those who, thanks to "jump out of uniform" and to walk about the crowd of civilian refugees from the security zone for a moment feel free and safe, were caught in the course of numerous rounds¹¹. Their distinctive clipping, a belt clip

⁶ M. Midlarsky, *Ludobójstwo w XX w*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2010, p. 32.

⁷ I. Chiang, *The Rape of Nankin: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, Basic, New York 1997, p. 39.

⁸ Ibidem, s.39-40.

⁹ M. Midlarsky, op. cit., s.32.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ J. Margolin, *Japonia 1937- 1945: wojna Armii Cesarza*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie „Dialog”, Warszawa 2009, p.197.

on the forehead or a rifle on the shoulder, traces of maneuvering on the hands betrayed them. Possible doubts did not affect the fate of the suspect. The Japanese acted, in such cases, in principle: „[...] *It is better to kill 10 innocents than to leave at least one former soldier at liberty* [...]”¹².

The largest single-hostage executions in the Far East, as well as throughout the history of modern wars, was carried out near Mount Mufu, north of Nanjing; There were 57,000 soldiers and civilians killed there using machine guns. Japanese soldiers also divested suburbs and nearby villages, seen as dressed in civilian clothes of soldiers of life, it was irrelevant to the perpetrators of the fact that among the accused were women and children¹³. The future victims did not know what was going to happen to them, they were promised to transport them to prisoner-of-war camps, and then the silence of the day was interrupted by the whistles of the cartridges, mingled with groaning and desperate moans. Murders, in order to ensure the effectiveness of their actions, pierced each body with bayonets or practiced the art of sword control on it. The bodies were usually covered with gasoline and set on fire, and then thrown into the river¹⁴.

The perpetrators of the Nineyan extermination demonstrated the persuasiveness of inventiveness. They buried their victims (often only to the neck, then cut their bodies with white arms), trampled them with horses and tanks, hung on hooks for tongues¹⁵. They ordered the dogs to torn the buried in the ground at the waist, they crossed or nailed their victims to trees or telegraph poles, they cut their victims from their skins, they cut off their ears and noses However, the Japanese men were most interested in driving Chinese on the roofs of wooden houses, covering the partitions of buildings with flammable means, burning and watching the tragic death of their victims in flames. Urban green spaces and squares were filled with the remains of burned citizens of Nanjing¹⁶.

A lot of entertainment provided the imperial invaders "sending the Chinese for the fish" - driving them naked into the icy water in the winter Yangzi and frozen ponds Mo Zhou, Xuan and Wu. Unfortunately, people who tried to save and surfaced, were shot and thrown in grenades, and children were stuffed into bayonets¹⁷.

The killers did not even bother to hide their barbarity. They commemorated their

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ J. Polit, , op. cit., s.35.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

bestiality in the photos, and then sent the negatives to Shanghai to call out them. The workers of photographic shops passed evidence of the cruelty to foreign journalists, who have raised the issue in the international arena¹⁸.

Particular place in the history of the Nanking tragedy is occupied by rape on the women there. To this day, it is not known exactly how many women of Nanjing have become victims to such sexual offenses. If we assume that the number of ladies at the age when they were most at risk of being attacked by Japanese soldiers, closed in the range of 50,000 and taking into account, that many of them have been raped several times, we come to the conclusion, that a large percentage (10-30%) of young women was raped in a short time¹⁹. On December nights, members of the International Committee (custody body over Nankin city administration during the Japanese occupation, it comprised of 7 Americans, 4 Brits, 3 Germans and 1 Dane) met with over a thousand rape cases. Few women could feel safe, the oldest victim was 66 years old, the youngest was 9 years old²⁰. They were also not

protected by the social condition - sexual abuse was experienced by even Buddhist nuns²¹.

In search of hua gu niang (young women), the Japanese soldiers entered houses as well as to Christian churches and Sunday schools. Almost one third of the rape took place in a white day, in front of the family²². The huntings were popular- captured in homes, in the streets or in neighboring villages, women were transported to barracks²³. They were freed the next morning, less often days or weeks after the abduction - in such situations abducted women were usually servants and sex slaves²⁴.

Many of the Japanese warriors believed that the virginity rape would strengthen them in battle, give them strength, some made amulets from the hair of adolescent victims to protect them against injuries. Soldiers who had cameras with no resistance snapped up pornographic photographs, which were key evidence in the postwar process²⁵. From the testimonies of one of the Japanese cavalymen, it was revealed that during a collective sexual assault on China woman, the Japanese soldiers saw a woman in her, so after the rape ended, when they killed their victim, she was for them something like sow, nothing more²⁶. Selected

¹⁸ J. Fenby, *Chiny. Narodziny i upadek wielkiej potęgi*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2009, p.399.

¹⁹ J. Margolin, op. cit., p.212..

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ J. Polit, ,op. cit., p.37.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ J. Margolin, op. cit., p.212.

²⁵ J. Polit, ,op.cit. ,p. 37.

²⁶ J. Fenby, op. cit., p.398.

women were dying with sticks in the vagina, and pregnant women were being deprived of their fetuses. Many young women have gone to the "amusement houses", created to assure the enjoyment of the Japanese occupants, who have identified women prisoners as "cloaks" in order to meet one of their basic needs²⁷

Rape was the rule in the case of resistance, often ending in murder. One member of the International Committee has left such a relationship: „[...] Yesterday (eleventh of January, a month after entering the Nanjing imperial army) I saw a woman who had many knife blows and whose head was almost cut off. With four other women she was led by the Japanese to the Nanyang university, they claimed they needed some women to do laundry and work as maids. According to the story of this woman, the youngest and most beautiful of them was raped almost forty times every night after she was washing clothes all day. She and the other two did their work during the day and were raped ten times at night. One day two soldiers took her to an empty house where they tried to cut off her head. She was left with a really nasty wound on her neck, but it was a miracle that she was still alive.

Fortunately,
*no major organ of life has suffered [...]*²⁸.

There have been cases where women were persuaded or forced for prostitution, were at hand out every night. As Private Tadokoro Kozo from the 114 Japanese divisions testified:

„[...] Women were certainly the first victims ... We chose a sunny place, for example, the piers near the hangars, and we made a veil, hanging the leafy branches. We got a ticket, called a *sekken*, a red ticket, stamped by the company commander, and we waited for our turn with the loosened hip brace [...]

„[...] Women were certainly the first victims ... We chose a sunny place, for example, the piers near the hangars, and we made a veil, hanging the leafy branches. We got a ticket, called a *sekken*, a red ticket, stamped by the company commander, and we waited for our turn with the loosened hip brace [...]

In the situation when the murder of family members, neighbors or friends during rape was on the day order, the least resistance against the representatives of the Japanese army, opposition to the execution of the order, and any attempt to hide or escape automatically linked to the death of such a man- „[...] Japanese soldiers killed not only every captive they captured, but also a great number of civilians of all ages. Many of them were murdered in the streets, as if it was rabbit hunting. [...] Many Chinese were timid and started to run away as soon as they were asked something. That was what happened to this man [...] These two Japanese men did not seem to be more agitated than if

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 213.

²⁹ Ibidem.

they had ripped the rat and did not even stop smoking, talking and laughing [...]”³⁰.

Offenses against the citizens of Nanjing also include the robbery of their property.

The widespread robbery, vandalism, and the arson associated with them have led to make life in Nanjing even more difficult and dangerous³¹. It should be stressed, however, that the Chinese military authorities have wiped the trail through the use of burnt land-
„[...] All the villages were burned down. Barracks, villas in the Mausoleum Park, a modern school of chemical warfare, experimental agricultural research laboratories, police school and dozens of other institutions lay in ruins. Fires spread to districts near the South Gate and Hsiakwan - in fact small, independent townships. It was thought that the fires caused deliberately by the Chinese army destroyed the fortune of \$ 20-30 million, more than the Japanese bombing months. It is possible, however, that the Japanese, with their siege artillery and post-seizure activities, equalized this loss [...]”³². There should also be mentioned here many testimonials relating to theft at the time of the retreat of Japanese soldiers. However, they were limited to grocery stores, which had been closed for a

long time by owners, there were no acts of vandalism or arson³³.

Murders, rape and theft were discontinued only when Matsui Iwane entered the city with the intention of holding a ceremonial parade. When he saw, what happened, strongly criticized his subordinates, not forgetting Prince Asaki. He even stated that: *„[...] the Japanese army was probably the most undisciplined army in the modern world [...]”³⁴.*

The hardships of slaughter in the capital of the Republic of China as well as its duration (six weeks - from December 1937 to the beginning of February 1938) raises the question of how half the inhabitants of Nanjing have managed to get out of this nightmare. Looking for answers, it is worth noting the invaluable role of 27 foreigners - Europeans and Americans - in the city- staff of consulates, schools, hospitals and charities³⁵. They created the so-called Security Zone in Nanjing, limited to the north and south streets of Chungshan and Hanchung. It was comprised of university buildings, Ginling Women's Arts and Science College, and

³⁰ J. Margolin, op. cit., p. 215.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ I. Chiang, op. cit., p.51

³⁵ J. Polit, op.cit.,p.38.

hospitals³⁶. The shelter found in it from 200 to 300 thousand refugees. The leader of this rescue effort was the leader of NSDAP in Nanjing, Hitler's enthusiast, John Rabe, whom the Chinese nicknamed "The Living Buddha"³⁷.

Driving around the city in a steel helmet and a car with a noticeable swastika, Rabe rescued people from the Japanese chase, watching over the safety of his charges in the Zone, he gave the children born in the Zone \$ 10 gifts for boys and \$ 9.5 for girls (the difference was due to the lower rank of Chinese girls in their native culture)³⁸.

The Nankian refugees would also not have survived without the help and dedication of the American surgeon Robert Wilson, who did the surgeries of the mutilated and burned men for free despite threats from Japanese, and Dean of the Ginling Women's Arts and Science College, Wilhelmina Vautrin, who hid thousands of women on campus³⁹.

When general Dang Shengshi escaped from Nanjing, the city population became the victim of one of the most horrible crimes in the history of the world. The number of people exterminated by the Japanese army remains undefined, although lack of precision does not depress the scale of the tragedy that has

occurred. US-based Chinese historian Wu Tienweei estimates that 630,000 people died in the result of the massacre, but he does not explain whether this number also includes refugees and garrison troops⁴⁰. American historian Lloyd Eastman is convinced of "at least" the 42,000 killed in the Chinese city, but his colleague Akira Iriye insists on 200,000 victims. Japanese scientists have not reached consensus between the three and the forty-two thousand victims. The exception here is Honda Katsuichi, who believes,

that in the first days of the Japanese occupation two hundred Chinese were killed, and by February the number of killed had risen to 300,000⁴¹.

This number also does not give rise to arguments of revisionists from Japan, who deny the occurrence of the Nanjing genocide. Chinese people assume that as a result of the Japanese occupation of the then-Chinese capital, three thousand of their compatriots were killed by the Japanese occupation of the then-capitalist Republic of China, but the latest analysis

of documents from the past proves that the victims were in fact much less- 100,000⁴².

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Ibidem, p.38-39.

³⁹ Ibidem, p.39.

⁴⁰ J. Polit, op.cit., p. 40.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² J. Fenby, op. cit., s.397.

Historian David Askew noted, that the escape of most of the Nanjing's citizens before the capture of the city by the imperial soldiers resulted in the fact, that at the time of the fall of Nanjing there were no more than 250,000 people living there. The number of people buried included nearly thirty-two thousand⁴³, ⁴⁴.

It was explained thus, that civilian casualties could not be more than the population gathered in the city. This truism would be out of time if Iris Chang and official Chinese historiography did not point to the number of civilians killed above 200 and even 300,000, using the number of Nanjing's citizens, present in the capital of the Republic of China until December 12⁴⁵. The author bases her view on the Washington National Archives, identified by the American intelligence report, sent by Japanese Foreign Minister Hiroty Koki on January 17, 1938, about the murder of not less than three hundred thousand Chinese civilians, in many cases with cold blood⁴⁶

Interestingly, thousands of pages of daily orders, private dailies, letters, reports (especially the International Committee), diplomatic depeches, press articles seem to

emphasize that there has been no genocide in Nanjing or the murder of Chinese citizens in Nanjing,

there is none, even the smallest mention of systematic attempts to annihilate the population

of the city of Nanjing. The only group of civilians massively exterminated by the Japanese military were young, adult males, often mistaken for Chinese soldiers and treated like them⁴⁷.

The surgeon, Robert Wilson, was aware of the dangers hanging over them: „[...] *And now [the Japanese] tell us that there are still 20,000 soldiers in the zone, where they take these numbers, and that they are going to kill them and kill them all. . This means every man present in the city in a proper physical state between the ages of 18 and 50 [...]*”⁴⁸. It follows,

that the number of this age group, which had few representatives among refugees, was low, because it was living in quite high danger and was characterized by greater mobility from the women with children⁴⁹.

It is with almost a hundred percent sure, that the Japanese emperor knew about the massacre in the Chinese capital. To

⁴³ Ibidem

⁴⁴ D. Askew, *The Nanjing Incident: Recent Research and Trends*, [in:] Official website of electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies: <http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/Askew.html> (access: 23.09.2017)

⁴⁵ J. Margolin, op. cit., p.218.

⁴⁶ J. Polit, op .cit., p.41.

⁴⁷ J. Margolin, op. cit., p. 218.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

the end he believed that a single, decisive blow, as he perceived the Nanjing massacre, would suppress the resistance of the Chinese⁵⁰. After defeating Shanghai, Japan followed the designated route and presented the Chinese side,

by a German ambassador, draconian peace conditions which the Chinese Republic denied strongly. Although the incidents in Nanjing were known in Japan as an incident not to annoy the United States, which could introduce a blockade on raw materials for war-torn countries, these battles in China has been elevated to a sanctuary clash, that strengthens the imperial "enlightened reign"⁵¹.

Is there any rational explanation for the long-lasting mass brutality used in the Nanjing massacre?? Jonathan Fenby, author of *"The History of Modern China: The Fall and Rise of a Great Power"*⁵² indicates that one of the reasons for this extermination was the increasing tension of the Japanese army since the start of the Battle of Shanghai. It should be emphasized that the majority of the Imperial Japanese Armed Forces at the time was composed of young people from backward rural areas, who at the "appropriate time" ventured their wild instincts, suppressed until the victory by military discipline⁵³. The

Japanese won the clash so they could fare like the winners and get their money back. Victims of this victory were primarily civilians and soldiers who had left the ranks before. These actions were consistent with the manner in which the Japanese soldiers used the terms of reference for the invaded country. One of them even wrote in his diary the following: "The Chinese resemble ants crawling on the ground"⁵⁴. Another has quoted the following story: „[...] *One day Lieutenant Ono told us: You have never killed anyone before, so today you will have a small mortar in the killing. You may not consider the Chinese to be human but for something less than a dog or a cat. Be brave! Now let those who want to kill, show us now. No one moved. Lieutenant lost patience, shouted; Coward, none of you is worthy to be called a Japanese soldier. So no one does not report? So I will choose. He began to call names, including mine. With trembling hands I lifted the rifle and walked slowly toward the, paralyzed by fear, Chinese standing next to the grave, which he helped to dig. In my heart I begged him for forgiveness and - with closed eyes, hearing the lieutenant's curses - I stuck in a paralyzed Chinese bayonet. When I opened my eyes again, he fell to the bottom. I thought of myself: The*

⁵⁰ J. Fenby, op. cit., p.399.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² J. Fenby, *The History of Modern China: The Fall and Rise of a Great Power*, Penguin Press and Harper Collins, 2008.

⁵³ J. Fenby, *Chiny. Narodziny i upadek wielkiej potęgi*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2009, p.398.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

murderer! Criminal! [...]”⁵⁵. Here is an example of a decapitation lesson given to a young Japanese officer by a Lieutenant Tanaka: „[...] Tanaka turned to us and looked at each of us face to face. The head should be cut like this - he said, extracting his sword. He took the bucket of water, raised his sword with a long bow. Standing behind the prisoner, Tanaka settled himself, spreading his legs wide and struck off a head screaming. The head went farther than a meter. The blood pumped out from the body in two fountains and blazed down [...]”⁵⁶. Participation in such activities quickly killed the last moral scruples.

Summarizing for the above considerations may be words of Nagatomi Hakuda- doctor, veteran of the Japanese-Chinese war: „[...] *I cut people, I starved them to death, buried them alive, a total of more than two hundred. It is scary that I could turn into an animal and allow such things. There really is no word to explain what I was doing then. I was really devil [...]”⁵⁷. Similar behaviors of the Japanese troops can be seen in successive, conquered, cities. Nipponu's divisions also liquidated entire villages in case*

of suspicion of the local people's sympathy for the Chinese troops fighting the Japanese⁵⁸. In other occupied areas, for example in Korea, local people were forced to serve in the Japanese army or in the camp guard. The exact number of deaths in Nanjing is unknown, it is estimated to be 10 000-300,000 victims⁵⁹. How do people, whom whole world has collapsed at the beginning of December, 1937, feel? Mark Eykholt writes, that „[...] *For Chinese, the Nanjing Massacre is an immediate symbol of outrages committed by Japanese troops during the war and of China's victimization by imperialist aggression. As such, the Massacre is a high sensitive event to Chinese people, causing anger, when doubted and contempt, when misconstrued [...]”⁶⁰.*

Bibliography:

- [1] Askew D., *The Nanjing Incident: Recent Research and Trends*, [in:] Official website of electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies: <http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/Askew.html>
- [2] Chiang I., *The Rape of Nankin: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*, Basic, New York 1997.
- [3] Eykholt M., *Aggression, Victimization and Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre* [in:] J.A. Fogel (ed.), *The Nanjing*

⁵⁵ J. Polit, op. cit., p.43.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p.44.

⁵⁸ J. Tyszkiewicz, *Zbrodnie w czasie II wojny światowej*, [in:] J. Tyszkiewicz, E. Czapiewski (ed.), *Historia powszechna. Wiek XX*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2017, p.505.

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

⁶⁰ M. Eykholt, *Aggression, Victimization and Chinese Historiography of the Nanjing Massacre* [in:] J.A. Fogel (ed.), *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography*, University of California Press, California 2000, p.11.



Massacre in History and Historiography,
University of California Press, California
2000.

[4] Fenby J., *Chiny. Narodziny i upadek
wielkiej potęgi*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków
2009.

[5] Margolin J., *Japonia 1937- 1945:
wojna Armii Cesarza*, Wydawnictwo
Akademickie „Dialog”, Warszawa 2009.

[6] Midlarsky M., *Ludobójstwo w XX w.*,
Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa
2010.

[7] Polit J., *Chiny*, Wydawnictwo TRIO,
Warszawa 2004.

[8] Polit J., *Smutny kontynent. Z dziejów
Azji Wschodniej w XX wieku*, Wydawnictwo
Arcana Kraków 2002.