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David vs. Goliath: Resisting the Denial of the Nanking Massacre
ダビデ対ゴリアテ　南京虐殺否定に抗する
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Under ultraconservative Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, the process of Japan's remilitarization has recently gained momentum. Japan's rightward shift is embodied in a military buildup, Abe's pilgrimage to Yasukuni Shrine, and historical revisionism. The buildup includes a new warship and more funding for the Self Defense Forces, greater surveillance over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, ignoring local opposition to a new military base in Okinawa, the State Secrets Law, establishment of an American-style national security council, and plans to reinterpret Article 9 of the Constitution to allow for collective self-defense.

In December 2013 the Prime Minister worshipped at Yasukuni Shrine, probably violating the Constitution's separation of church and state while sending a symbolically violent message to the people of neighboring countries victimized during the Asia-Pacific War (1931-45). Predictably, his visit infuriated Beijing and Seoul, but also prompted a sharp rebuke from Washington, demonstrating how isolated he is on rehabilitating Japan's wartime past.

Beyond lifting constitutional constraints on the military and beefing up Japan's security capabilities, Abe and his supporters recognize the significance of rewriting history. Two of the most crucial areas of historical revisionism concern the government-sponsored enslavement and raping of women euphemistically termed "comfort women," and the 1937 Nanking Massacre. In the last few years many influential public figures in Japan have claimed either that these atrocities never occurred or minimized their significance. In January 2014, in his first press conference as head of NHK (Japan's equivalent to the BBC) Momii Katsuto downplayed the importance of the controversial comfort women system of wartime sexual slavery by equating it misleadingly with similar practices in other countries. This provoked domestic and international condemnation similar to the outcry sparked by the apologist remarks of Osaka Mayor Hashimoto Toru in 2013 and indeed by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's quibbling in 2007 about the degree of coercion used in recruiting Korean teenage girls to serve as comfort women. This revisionist revanchism has become rampant as Hyakuta Naoki, one of NHK's new board members also appointed at Abe's behest, openly denied that the Nanjing massacre happened, a position that raises further questions about Abe's judgment and agenda.

Here we focus on the Nanking Massacre and the campaign underway in Nagoya, Japan's fourth largest city, to persuade the public that the established historical record of the Nanjing Massacre is false. Citizens in Nagoya are contesting this revisionist disinformation and fighting to preserve the memory of the Massacre, strengthening ties of friendship between Chinese and Japanese, and educating people about the horrors of war. They understand that whitewashing the past is not the way forward.

Mayor Kawamura's Statement

Two years ago on 20 February 2012 the Mayor of Nagoya, Kawamura Takashi, told a delegation of visiting officials from Nanjing that "the Nanking Incident probably never happened."

The Mayor made this shocking statement in a speech to a delegation paying a courtesy visit as part of Nagoya and Nanjing's sister city relationship. The incident he denied was the Nanking Massacre that started on 13 December 1937. For six weeks Japanese troops rampaged throughout Nanjing, which had been left unprotected by Chinese troops. Although the exact death toll is hotly disputed, mainstream Japanese historians believe it was in excess of 150,000 while more conservative historians such as Hata Ikuhiko assert a minimum of 40,000 died. In addition, thousands of women were gang raped and killed while looting, and arson was widespread during this rampage. No credible historian—above all no credible Japanese historian— supports the thesis that Nanjing was a fabrication as alleged by Mayor Kawamura, but apparently revisionists are not bound by the facts or by evidence.

Mayor Kawamura's massacre denial caused an immediate suspension of all official exchanges between the cities of Nagoya and Nanjing. For their part, Prime Minister Abe, former Tokyo governor Ishihara Shintaro, and the Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform (Tsukuru Kai) welcomed Mayor Kawamura's statement. (See Tsukuru Kai's statement of support at http://www.tsukurukai.com/_src/sc913/nankinpamphlet.pdf).

Support for Mayor Kawamura's denial within the Tsukuru Kai was such that they organized a conference in Tokyo only a few weeks later, on 6 March 2012. The conference theme was "Supporting the 'Kawamura Statement': Condemning the Myth of the 'Nanking Massacre'." At this conference, Tsukuru Kai started a new organization called the "Japanese Citizens Movement for Truth about Nanjing" (Nankin no Shinjitsu Kokumin Undō, http://ameblo.jp/nankinkokumin). The new group clearly states their full support for Kawamura on their website.

Many months before Kawamura made his outrageous remarks to the sister-city delegation from Nanjing, other denialists were already paving the way for him. On 12 July 2011 an association calling itself the "Nagoya City Council Members Association for Thinking about History Textbooks" (Rekishi Kyōkasho Wo Kangaeru Nagoya Shikaigiin No Kai) led by Nagoya City Council member Fujisawa Tadamasa and including other City Council members from the LDP and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) held an "Open Debate on Junior High School History and Civics Textbooks," which was attended by 150 people.

At this "open debate" the textbook publisher Jiyūsha gave a presentation on the merits of its revisionist history textbook and its editorial policies. In attendance were three members of the city board of education: the Superintendent for Education of Nagoya City, the head of the Board of Education, and another member of the Board. A representative of another revisionist textbook publisher, Ikuhosha, also attended. The junior high school textbooks used in Nagoya now are published by the reputable publisher Kyōiku Shuppan, but since four out of the six members on the Board of Education who have the final say in textbook selections were handpicked by Kawamura, there is a very good chance that a revisionist text will be selected this year for use in the school system. Kawamura favors the Jiyūsha textbooks, but the Ikuhosha text may well be selected.

Subsequently, on 19 May 2013, Mayor Kawamura gave the keynote speech at a public forum attended by about 280 people that focused on whether a massacre had occurred. Fujisawa Tadamasa, the revisionist Nagoya City Council member, served as master of ceremonies. One of the central revisionist figures in Japan, Professor Fujioka Nobukatsu, and three city council members also attended the debate as panelists. A group calling itself the "Association of Volunteer City Council Members Who Freely Debate the Nanking Incident" (Nankin Jiken Wo Jiyū Ni Giron Suru Giin Yūshi No Kai) sponsored the event. The Mayor called for freedom of expression and freedom of debate as a way to legitimize the Massacre denialist agenda in terms of democratic principles.

Kawamura acknowledged that it was "unfortunate" that "conventional acts of combat" occurred in Nanjing, but he doubts that a massacre occurred because the people of Nanjing treated his father with warm hospitality when he went there in 1945. Although 1945 was seven years after the end of the Massacre (in January 1938), he doubted that the people of Nanjing would have treated his father with such hospitality had something like that occurred. This is akin to an American man claiming that Americans probably never firebombed Tokyo with jellied petroleum in 1945 because some Japanese people in Tokyo were very kind to his father visiting Tokyo in 1952. (On March 9 and 10, 1945 the United States incinerated 100,000 civilians in Tokyo, another war crime in the Asia-Pacific War).

The Response of Nagoya Citizens

Citizens of Nagoya are opposing Mayor Kawamura's Massacre denial. On 31 March 2012, 170 concerned citizens held an emergency meeting and established a website, "Citizens Documenting the Statements of Mayor Kawamura about Nanjing." (http://www.kawamura-nankin.com/) The featured speakers at this meeting were Mikami Shō and Ono Kenji. Mr. Mikami, a sailor in the wartime Imperial Japanese Navy, is one of the few living Japanese eyewitnesses to the Massacre. His testimony was of unique historical value and profoundly moving. Mr. Ono Kenji is a grassroots historian and factory worker from Fukushima Prefecture. He spoke about testimonies from former Japanese soldiers that he gathered. He is one of the co-editors of the book Nankin daigyakusatsu wo kiroku shita kōgun heishi tachi (1996) [Imperial Japanese Army Soldiers' Records of the Nanking Massacre] along with the historian Fujiwara Akira and the journalist Honda Katsuichi. The citizens invited the Mayor to the event, but he did not respond.

The mass media in Japan did not cover this or other events in Nagoya challenging the revisionist narrative of history. Only the local television station, the Nagoya Broadcasting Network, has paid attention to the issue. The Network is very influential in the Nagoya area and has repeatedly broadcast programs critical of the Mayor. It is the one bright local light of responsible journalism. Nevertheless, while the Mayor has enjoyed full access to the mass media, with his statements broadcast nation-wide, the voices of the citizens of Nagoya are rarely heard. This is not surprising since the voices of Japanese historians and journalists who could rectify revisionists misleading assertions about the Massacre have only been granted limited mass media access. This virtual muzzling of credible experts is a boon to revisionists, allowing them to get away with gross distortions of the historical record.

On 7 July 2012, marking the 75th anniversary of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident that lead to an escalation of Japanese hostilities in China, about 100 Nagoya citizens formed an organization to hold a symposium and demand that the Mayor retract his statement. Named the "Committee to Make Mayor Kawamura Retract his Denial of the Nanking Massacre" (Kawamura Shichō Nankin Gyakusatsu Hitei Hatsugen Wo Tekkai Saseru Kai), the Committee's goal is to have the Mayor recognize the Nanking Massacre as historical fact and restore the sister city relationship by retracting his denial.

For this inaugural event the Committee organized a lecture by the acclaimed historian Kasahara Tokushi, author of many books on the Nanking Massacre. He mainly discussed the contents of his book, Nankin jiken ronsō shi: Nihonjin wa shijitsu wo dō ninshiki shite kita ka [The History of the Debate over the Nanking Incident: What is the Japanese Understanding of the Historical Facts?] (Heibonsha, 2007), where he sought to answer the question, "Why is Nanking Massacre denialism so widespread and influential in Japan?" He explained that it is simply due to a lack of understanding of war and history that is common among Japanese citizens, and has nothing to do with the veracity of the denialists' claims because their claims have been proven false by numerous historians and in courts of law.

On 15 December 2012, commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Massacre, a survivor from Nanjing gave testimony in Nagoya at another major event organized by the Committee. Ms. Xia Shuqin told an audience of 170 people about her terrifying experience, when at the age of eight she narrowly escaped death during the rampage. Her testimony was the same as the one she gave to Iris Chang for her book The Rape of Nanking (1997), but everyone was moved when they heard Ms. Xia's account firsthand. She appears as an eight-year old child in the famous footage that Rev. John Magee shot in December 1937 in Nanjing. Nevertheless, a Japanese intellectual historian, Higashinakano Shudo, accused her of fabricating her story in his book The Nanking Massacre: Fact versus Fiction (2006). In 2009 the Tokyo District Court upheld her suit for defamation of character against this denialist.

On 5 January 2013 the Committee held a concert with performances by Chinese singers and musicians in honor of the 35th anniversary of the Nanjing and Nagoya sister city friendship. Again the Committee invited the Mayor, but he chose not to attend.

On the anniversary of the Nanking Massacre in 2013, the Committee hosted a lecture in Nagoya by Wang Jin, another Massacre survivor who recalled the traumatic events. She also spoke to audiences in the cities of Tokyo, Osaka, Kobe, and Kanazawa, a speaking tour

facilitated by Sino-Japanese friendship organizations in Japan.

Since the formation of the Nagoya-based Committee it has organized numerous events to counter the damage inflicted on Sino-Japanese relations by Massacre denialists and to educate citizens about the history that revisionists are eager to erase. It has also invited the Mayor and Nagoya City Council members to events it has organized, made demands for a retraction known, and organized publicity events in front of City Hall.

The members of the Committee feel that today when history is being rewritten and conflicts over territory between Japan and neighboring countries are intensifying, Japanese must directly confront the historical truth, treasure friendship with Chinese, and work towards building bonds with them through grassroots initiatives. Two years have passed since Kawamura made his insulting denial, one that undermines Japan's interests and reputation while ignoring what the Imperial Armed Forces inflicted on Nanjing's residents. There is no dignity in denial, only the shame of shirking historical responsibility and demonstrating to the world that there are Japanese determined to sully their nation's honor by airbrushing its inglorious past. Again this year the Committee will challenge the shabby narrative of denial. On 21 February the Committee screened a documentary about the history of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-45). This educational event constitutes yet another step in the continuing struggle by ordinary citizens (David) against the Mayor and his accomplices at City Hall (Goliath). History is far too important to let politicians hijack it for their reactionary agenda of provoking China and thereby increasing regional tensions in order to justify their militaristic goals. Reclaiming the initiative on history is key to remind Chinese that relatively few Japanese support the revisionists even if they are over-represented in the corridors of power. The dead-end of denial is obvious. Japan must take the measure of its shared past with Asia to regain the trust it has forfeited.

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