

Textbook A Excerpt

In August 1937, two Japanese soldiers, one an officer, were shot to death in Shanghai (the hub of foreign interests). After this incident, the hostilities between Japan and China escalated. Japanese military officials thought Chiang Kai-shek would surrender if they captured Nanking, the Nationalist capital; they occupied that city in December.* But Chiang Kai-shek had moved his capital to the remote city of Chongqing. The conflict continued.

*At this time, many Chinese soldiers and civilians were killed or wounded by Japanese troops (the Nanjing Incident). Documentary evidence has raised doubts about the actual number of victims claimed by the incident. The debate continues even today.

Textbook B Excerpt

The Nanjing Massacre: In December 1937, the Japanese military captured Nanjing. The Japanese military committed bloody atrocities against the residents of Nanjing and prisoners of war, killing them in extremely cruel methods including mass execution, burning, burying alive, beheading, and biting by dogs. The Nanjing Massacre was the most horrible [event] in world [history]...

According to statistics, the estimate of the deaths caused by Japanese atrocities against unarmed Nanjing residents and Chinese soldiers amounted to more than 300,000 just during the six weeks of the occupation by the Japanese military. The Nanjing Massacre is one of the greatest acts of violence perpetrated by the Japanese aggressors on the Chinese people.

Document C: Historian Jonathan Spence

There followed in Nanjing a period of terror and destruction that must rank among the worst in the history of modern warfare. For almost seven weeks the Japanese troops, who first entered the city on December 13, unleashed on the defeated Chinese troops and on the helpless Chinese civilian population a storm of violence and cruelty that has few parallels. The female rape victims, many of whom died after repeated assaults, were estimated by foreign observers living in Nanjing at 20,000; the fugitive soldiers killed were estimated at 30,000; murdered civilians at 12,000. Other contemporary Chinese estimates were as much as ten times higher (300,000) and it is difficult to establish exact figures. Certainly robbery, wanton destruction, and arson left much of the city in ruins, and piles of dead bodies were observable in countless locations.

Source: Excerpt from Jonathan Spence's book, The Search for Modern China, published in 1999. Spence specialized in Chinese history and taught at Yale University from 1993 to 2008.