

Remembering on May 4, 2016: Past experience, if not forgotten, can be a guide to the future Qian shi bu wang

This short article presents photographic images of the Nanjing Memorial (China) in memory of the Nanjing massacre which took place in 1937 at the hands of the Japanese invaders. The article expresses a thought for the necessity not to forget the past, but also open such remembrances to exhibition cooperation between museums all over the world.

Years back (I think it was 2004) I contacted one of the museums on the second World War in Amsterdam to see if they were interested in cooperating with the Nanjing Memorial exhibition. I had just returned from Nanjing and documentaries on the Japanese occupation of Nanjing were only just being produced and advertised. To many people these documentaries were shocking as in Europe exposure on what happened in China during the Japanese occupation was still rather underestimated.

The moment for possible cooperation seemed there as within the Netherlands more request arose on the role of the various non-western nations of in the Netherlands existing ethnic groups, like for instance Morocco. Chinese youngsters in the Netherlands showed interest in the situation in China during World War 2, and I thought it very strange, if not, a lack of general information, that so view people knew anything about the Japanese occupation in China.

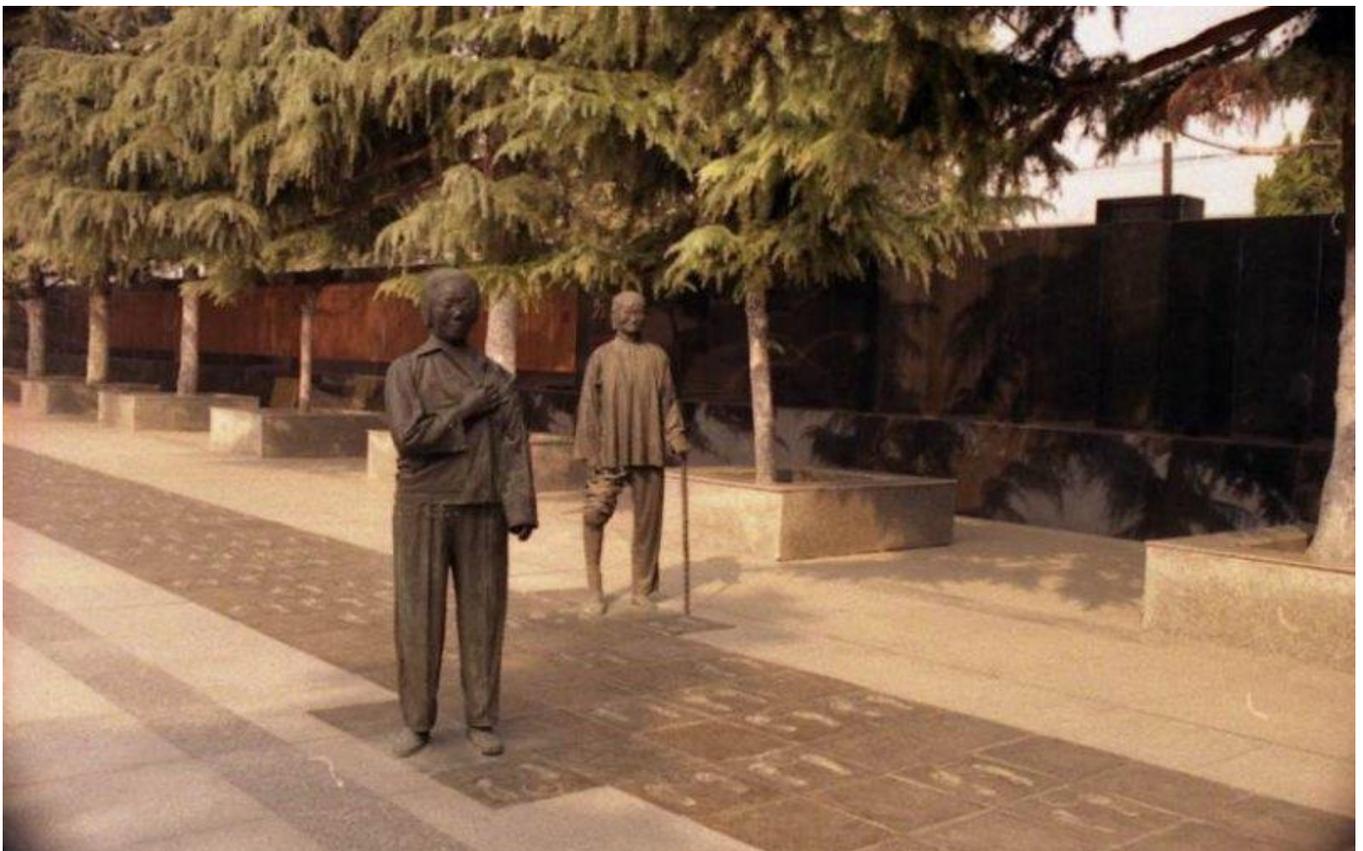
(photo Statue of Iris Chang, author of "The Rape of Nanjing")



The reaction from the museum was rather disappointing: “We only focus on the occupation by Germany”. I wondered if that particular Dutch cow would not be over-milked by now and how museums could afford to surpass growing importance of various more international topics.

As in the Netherlands on May 4th is a moment to memorize the victims of the second World War, in China such important dates are related to 1937, when the Japanese occupied Nanjing at the costs of 300.000 lives of mostly civilians. In 1999 the Chinese American Iris Chang published her book titled “The Rape of Nanjing” and it became one of the most historically important legacies on the Japanese occupation in China.

(photograph: Statues of the victims on the memorial grounds)



(photo: Footprints of the survivors in bronze on the memorial ground)



The author was so loved in China that, after Iris Chang committed suicide in 2004, she was memorialized by a statue at the Nanjing memorial. Her book is partly based on the diaries of John Rabe, the representative of Siemens in Nanjing during the time of the Japanese occupation.

He became known as the “Good Man of Nanjing” as he and 9 other Western representatives created a refugee zone in Nanjing, to prevent the Japanese from destroying all Nanjing citizens.

The Japanese nevertheless killed and looted, raped and tortured in the most beastly manner known to men. Nanjing has been called the biggest bloodbath of the 20th century, not because of the amount of death, but of the short period of time and the ‘handicraft’ with which it was omitted. The Nanjing memorial museum is an historical landmark which contains all of China’s pain on World War 2 in a form so dense that visitors, both Chinese and foreign never feel the same after viewing the exhibition.

Liberation day, as is May 5 in the Netherlands had no equivalent in China. Partly because of an irony in itself. After the World War 2 the International Military Far East Tribunal consisted of 11 judges and was presided by Australia. China held a seat, but could hardly match the other 9 Western representatives. Iwane Matsui, the Japanese general responsible for the rape of Nanjing was given the death penalty, together with 4 others. Yet, some 13 others were given life sentences. Given the fact that the Japanese killed more than 3,5 million Chinese in China and another 23 million ethnic Chinese in countries as Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malay and Burma.

(Poem on the wall in memory of the massacre)



In view of the military tribunals' sentences, for China, liberation did not really take place. Enforced by the lack of acknowledgement by Japan thereafter the conflict still rumbles underneath the surface. To resolve that conflict some international acknowledgement is needed at least.

Therefore, in the Netherlands, both the 4th and 5th of May could have a higher purpose. First of all, the Netherlands too have a history with Japan and the victims of the Japanese occupation in Indonesia (the former Dutch Indies) have been begging for acknowledgement ever since the war. Second of all, maybe it is time by now, to acknowledge that the second World War was a **world** (involving the entire world) at war, one which affected all people. And as the

Netherlands is by now also a nation of diversity, maybe it is time to extend its historically memory to the larger part of the world, if not for anything else, than at least for educational purposes.

How about this: Let's make this year a year of remembering all victims of the second World War as well as the current wars, as there are many. The Chinese proverb says: Past experience, if not forgotten, can be a guide to the future! Yet we still have not understood the through meaning of this, we still believe war to be a matter of geography, or ethnicity, or materialism, or national boundaries, but this is not the case: ***War is about madness.***

(photo: Statue for the brave women of Nanjing, symbolizing the fight of the mother saving her child)

