

Dear Ms. Chang,

This letter should have reached you sooner. It should have fallen into your lap two, three weeks ago. You should have been able to open it, to see me tell you how important your work has been to Chinese worldwide. You should have been able to see me thank you from the bottom of my heart for writing *The Rape of Nanking*.

But Nanking has claimed another victim. And I am profoundly sorry for that.

Much like you, Nanking has always been a part of my consciousness since I was growing up. My parents alluded to the term Nanjing Datusha sporadically but refused to dwell into details of how my maternal great-grandparents, as well as a great grand uncle on my father's side of the family, died in the hands of the Japanese. Nevertheless I knew that something irrepressibly evil had occurred in Nanking during World War 11 - largely because of the controversy the publication of your book generated.

Unfortunately, the tragedy never quite touched me then. Nanjing Datusha, to me as a child, was just a whispered horror that lay buried in a past generation. A generation embodied only by a Japanese-hating maternal grandmother who spoke a dialect I couldn't understand and who did strange things like refusing to step into a Japanese restaurant and weeping when she heard me play Japanese pop songs on my CD player. Yes - Nanjing belonged to a generation I could not understand.

I only learnt why my grandmother hated the Japanese so passionately after her death. Another great-uncle revealed during her funeral wake that my maternal grandmother had witnessed both her parents strung up on a tree and beaten to death by the Japanese soldiers.

That didn't happen in Nanking. It took place in a tiny non-descript village in the heart of china. The Japanese didn't just kill in Nanking. They slaughtered, murdered and tortured in a hundred other forgotten villages scattered throughout China. The scars of Nanking belong to all of china. The "forgotten holocaust" of Nanking was repeated on smaller scales elsewhere as well.

*Why* is so much learnt only through death?

In fact, Ms. Chang, to be honest, I never finished *The Rape of Nanking* until your death. I couldn't. I'd read about the atrocities you described, pictured the damning violence in my mind and turned away from your book in utter horror and disgust. I too had lost my ancestors in that "forgotten holocaust" and every word you penned and every photograph you included in your book was personal to me. It took me four years to finish the first four chapters, and each time I tried to read, I'd grow cold with horror at the banality of evil you made apparent in your book.

Yet it must have been far worse for you. You saw the primary evidence, the footage, the accounts that brimmed with grief and suffering. You relived the victims' horror and pain every day for years. How did you do it? How did you find the courage not to recoil?

So when I learnt of your suicide in the papers, I had to read your book. If you were brave enough to write the book, then I ought to do you the homage, at the very least, of reading it. One windy day I sat on a bench with an old copy of your book and thought of you. I opened the book and read.

And somehow, this time round I was able to finish *The Rape of Nanking*. I didn't try to distance myself from the horror. I didn't try to shut myself out from the stench and the wails of grief that you painted about me. Instead, as I immersed myself into the terror of Nanking, I saw John Rabe, Minnie

Vautrin, Dr. Robert Wilson and you in front of my eyes. I saw the "living Buddhas of Nanking" succoring thousands of victims; and I saw you pushing away the bamboo curtain that hid The Rape of Nanking from the world for so long. Thank you, Ms. Chang, for having been a beacon of hope and justice to all. Thank you for vindicating my grandmother's life. Thank you for having had the courage to tell the truth. And even though you will never read this letter, I hope that even before you died you understood what a difference you've made to this world. So thank you.

Yours truly,

Hann-Shuin Yew

Hann-Shuin Yew, Age 16, Grade 11

I was born in Singapore and grew up in an itinerant family whose frequent moves gave me the opportunity to live in cities such as Shanghai, Vancouver and now, San Jose. My exposure to varied cultures and to the ways Chinese communities lived in different parts of the world made me keenly interested in history and literature, especially works which enable me to better understand my own heritage. My other preoccupations include crossword puzzles, mindbenders, origami and occasional attempts at writing poetry.

亲爱的张女士：

这是一封迟到的信，它本应在两三周前落在您的膝头，那您就可以有机会展读，可以听我告诉您，您的著作对于全球华人有多么的重要，您也就有机会听我表达我由衷的感激之情。

然而如今南京又增加了一位牺牲者，这令我深深地遗憾。

和您一样，南京一直是只是我潜意识的一部分，伴随着我的成长。我的父母偶尔会零星星提及“南京大屠杀”这个名词，却拒绝细述我的曾外祖父母和曾叔公是怎样死在日本人的手中。尽管如此，我还是了解了，在二次世界大战期间，南京曾经发生的丧失理性的邪恶事件----大部分都是在您的《南京大屠杀》出版后引起的争议中知道的。

不幸的是，这悲剧以前并没有真正地触动我，南京大屠杀对于还是个孩子的我，只是一个埋藏在上一代人那里、不敢被触碰的恐怖话题。我对那一代人的印象来自于我那个仇恨日本人的外祖母，她讲着我听不懂的方言，做着一些我不能理解的古怪事情，比方说她会拒绝踏进一家日本餐馆的门，还会在听到我用CD机播放日本流行歌曲的时候哭泣。是的，南京是属于我不能理解的上一代人的话题。

直到我的外祖母去世以后我才了解她为何如此憎恨日本人。一位舅公在外祖母的葬礼上讲述了她如何亲眼目睹了自己的双亲被日本兵捆在一棵树上活活打死。这并不是发生在南京，而是发生在中国中部一个不知名的小村庄里。日本人的屠杀不只是发生在南京，中国的上百个被遗忘的村庄里都曾经发生过他们的杀戮和凌虐。南京的伤痕遍及中国，被遗忘的较小规模的屠杀在中国各地不同程度地一再上演。

为什么只有通过死亡的方式才能学习到这么多？

事实上，张女士，我承认，在您去世之前，我一直没有读完《南京大屠杀》这本书。我做不到！当我读到您在书中叙述的暴行，在脑海中想象那些残酷暴力的画面，极度的恐怖和恶心使我放下了您的书。我也在这场“被遗忘的屠杀”中失去了长辈，您书中的每句话、每幅照片都能引起我的共鸣。我花了四年的时间读完了前四章，每当我拿起书试着读下去，都对您书中揭示出的“平庸之罪”<sup>1</sup> (the banality of evil) 恐惧得浑身发冷。

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<sup>1</sup>“平庸之恶”，源自汉娜·阿伦特的著作《艾希曼在耶路撒冷：关于平庸之恶的报告》。意指缺乏思考与是非判断能力之人，对权力会象机器一般顺从、麻木和不负责任，纳粹的大屠杀就是独裁之罪与平庸之恶相结合的产物。

可是，您感受到的一定会比这可怕得多啊！您看到了那些充满了悲伤和苦难的最原始的证据、影片和陈词。您几年每一天都重温着受害者们那些年里每一天经历的恐惧和痛苦。您是怎样做到的呢？您的无所畏惧的勇气是从何而来呢？

所以当我从报纸上获悉您自杀的消息时，我必须要去读您的书。既然您勇敢地撰写了这本书，我理应至少读完它来向您致敬。这天，刮着风，我坐在一张长椅里读着这本已经不再崭新的您的著作，想念着您。

这一次，不知为什么，我竟然可以全部读完它。我没有试图让自己远离恐怖，没有试图在您描述的悲惨的气息和哀嚎中隔绝我自己。相反，当我把自己沉浸在南京的恐怖之中时，我看到了约翰·拉贝、明妮·魏特琳、罗伯特·威尔逊医生和您站在我的眼前。我看到了“南京的活菩萨们”在救助成千上万的受害者，我还看到您掀开了长期阻挡在世人与南京大屠杀之间的竹帘子。谢谢您，张女士，为了您敢于揭示真相的勇气。尽管您再也无法读到这封信，我仍然希望您离去前能了解您对这个世界做出的巨大改变。所以我感谢您！

您真诚的，

Hann-Shuin Yew

Hann-Shuin Yew <sup>2</sup>16岁， 11年级学生

我出生在新加坡，在成长的过程中随着我的家庭搬到过很多不同的城市，上海、温哥华和现在的美国加州圣何塞，我有机会领略不同的文化，也了解了世界不同地方的华人社区的生活方式，这使我非常喜欢历史和文学，尤其喜爱那些可以让我更加了解我的文化遗产的作品。我其它的爱好还有字谜游戏、益智游戏、折纸，偶尔还喜欢写写诗。

（杨惠翻译，简淑惠校对，8/6/2018）

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<sup>2</sup> 本文作者Hann-Shuin Yew是2005年度美国国会图书馆“图书改变我的生活--写给作者的信”征文比赛加州高中组第一名。本文是她的获奖征文。