

The Enemy of Comfort

Iris Chang's suicide speaks to the burden of remembering genocide

By Nicolaus Mills

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A week after the presidential elections, Iris Chang, the much-acclaimed author of "*The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*", was found dead in her car on a highway just south of Los Gatos, California. Before shooting herself, Chang left a carefully written suicide note at her home in San Jose and made sure that her body would be discovered by the police rather than by her husband or her 2-year-old son.

The newspaper stories that followed made a point of noting Chang's age —she was just 36 -- and explaining the success of the most important of her three books, *The Rape of Nanking*, which sold more than a half-million copies in America alone. But largely missing from the accounts of Chang's death were a serious assessment of her work and a recognition of the moral and intellectual vacuum her death leaves. In a world in which most stories on massacre and genocide have the drama of war reportage, Chang, whose grandparents fled the eastern Chinese city of Nanking as the violence there was beginning in 1937, never forgot that her subjects were the vanquished and the dead.

In choosing to write on the siege of Nanking by the Japanese -- later estimated to have been responsible for more than 260,000 deaths -- Chang selected a subject that had long been buried in Japan and even in the West. At the end of world War II, the Japanese naturally chose to emphasize the suffering they experienced as a result of the atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and America, then committed to rebuilding Japan as a buffer to communist China, was content to let the war crimes of its new ally against its new enemy fade from sight.

So things stood -- until Chang's book. Published on the 60th anniversary of the Nanking massacre, when she was 29, it both exposed the silence surrounding what happened at Nanking and opened up the question of how history is taught in Japanese schools, where the atrocities Japan committed during World War II are played down and the killing of thousands of Chinese at Nanking remains an "incident".

But at the heart of *The Rape of Nanking* was Chang's fascination with the politics of rescue -- her assessment of what those who in 1937 were still free to act did to save Chinese citizens, and how many of these rescuers, particularly Minnie Vautrin, an American school teacher, and John Rabe,

a German businessman, were pushed to the edge. Vautrin, after returning to the United States, had a nervous breakdown in 1941 and, despairing over what she had been unable to accomplish, committed suicide. Rabe was arrested and briefly jailed by the Gestapo in 1938, when he gave a film of the Nanking massacre to the German government. After the war, he lived for a time in Switzerland, surviving on food sent to him by the grateful citizens of Nanking.

Like Vautrin and Rabe, Chang was unwilling to rest on the notion that she had done enough for the victims of the Nanking Massacre. She refused to take comfort in the honors that her book brought her, and in the year on the road that she spent promoting it, she made a point of confronting those who questioned her figures or doubted her accuracy. On television, she challenged the Japanese ambassador to America to apologize for the Nanking Massacre and became outraged when all he would concede was that "really unfortunate things" had taken place.

Chang's husband did not release her suicide note, and press reports failed to offer any details, so we can only guess about what drove her to such despair. But what we do know, in retrospect, is the heavy burden Chang put on herself. At the end of her life, she was working on a book about the Bataan Death March and the abuse of American prisoners of war by the Japanese, and it is impossible not to wish she had taken on an easier subject. But in a world in which so many international figures -- the United Nations' Kofi Annan immediately comes to mind -- seem content to deal with the challenge of human disaster in the fashion of athletes out to achieve a winning record (you may lose in Rwanda, but you win in East Timor), Chang had a moral integrity that set her apart. She knew that in the world she dealt with, the price for not doing enough was always paid for by those most vulnerable, and she could not escape the notion that comfort was the great enemy of people like herself.

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心安之敌(The Enemy of Comfort)

张纯如弃世展现追忆战争浩劫的无法承受之重

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在美国总统大选一周后，备受赞誉的《南京浩劫：被遗忘的大屠杀》(*The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*)一书著者张纯如(Iris Chang)，被发现死于位于加利福尼亚州洛斯加托斯市(Los Gatos)以南的一条高速公路上自己的汽车里。开枪自杀之前，她在圣荷西市(San Jose)家里留下细心撰写的遗书，并确保她的尸体将被警察而不是她的丈夫或她 2 岁的儿子发现。

随后的新闻，报道了张纯如的年龄——年仅 36 岁，并解释了她三本著作中最重要的《南京大屠杀》的成功——该书仅在美国便售出 50 多万册。但是，对张纯如逝世的关注，很大程度上缺少对她的工作的认真评价，以及对她留下的道德和知识空白的认知。张的祖父母在 1937 年逃离了中国东部城市当时的首都南京，因为那里发生残暴的侵略战争。在如今大多数关于大屠杀和种族灭绝的故事都侧重对战争情节报道的世界里，张纯如从未忘记，她的主题是被征服和死去的人们。

通过描述日本军队对南京的围攻——后来估计这场战役导致 260,000 多人死亡——张纯如选择了一个长期被日本甚至西方世界深埋的题材。第二次世界大战结束后，日本人不出意料地选择强调他们由于在广岛和长崎投下的原子弹所遭受的苦难；而美国则因致力于重建日本作为针对共产主义中国的缓冲区，甘心让其新盟友对其新敌人所犯下的战争罪行从视野中消失。

于是这件事就这么一直波澜不惊，不为人知——直到张的书面世。在南京大屠杀 60 周年，也是张纯如 29 岁之际，这本书正式出版。它既暴露了围绕南京发生了什么事情的黑寂，也揭开了日本学校如何教授这段历史的问题。日本于二战期间在那里犯下的暴行被低调消声，南京城里发生的对成千上万的中国人的杀戮仍然只是一个“事件”。

然而进一步，《南京大屠杀》的核心是作者对于人道救援的政治的倾注——她评价彼时

彼地那些仍拥有人身行动自由的个人为拯救中国民众做了什么；以及这些人道救援者，尤其是美国教师明妮·魏特琳(Minnie Vautrin) 和德国商人约翰·拉贝(John Rabe)，如何为此努力到人生极限。魏特琳后来回到美国，1941 年时神经错乱，绝望于自己曾经无法完成的义务，自杀了。拉贝于 1938 年向德国政府递交了一部关于南京大屠杀的电影，为此被盖世太保逮捕并短暂监禁。二战后，他在瑞士生活了一段时间，依靠感激他的南京市民赠送的食物幸存下来。

像魏特琳和拉贝一样，张纯如并不认为她为南京大屠杀受害者所做的努力已经足够，也不能感到心安。她拒绝为自己的著作所带来的荣誉而稍感安慰。在巡回推介著作的那一年，她尤其直面应对那些质疑她的数字或者准确性的人。在电视节目中，她当面挑战日本驻美国大使，要其为南京大屠杀道歉。当他只肯承认那是“真正不幸的事情”发生时，她倍感愤怒。

张纯如的丈夫没有公布她的遗书，新闻报道也没提供任何细节，所以我们只能猜测是什么驱使她如此绝望。但从回顾中我们能够确认无疑的，是她自己身心的沉重负担。在她生命的最后，她正在写一本关于巴丹死亡行军和日本人虐待美国战俘的书——我们是多么希望时光倒流她选择的是另一个稍微轻松的主题。在这样一个世界里，许多国际人物——联合国秘书长科菲·安南(Kofi Annan) 立刻浮现在脑海中——似乎满足于以运动员的方式应对人类灾难的挑战，去获得一个胜利成功的记录（你可能在卢旺达输了，但是无妨，在东帝汶赢了）。而张纯如的道德品范则卓然独立。在她的认知的世界里，做得不够的代价总是落到那些最易受伤害的人身上；她无法摆脱这样一种观念：像她这样的人的最大的敌人，是心安。

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