

# *Emotion and Memory: Emotional Guidance for the History Education of the Nanjing Massacre*

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**Abstract:** The emotion of hatred is a quite sensitive topic in the history education of the Nanjing Massacre. With what emotions should we study and remember this part of Chinese history? How can we achieve the vision of world peace by virtue of the history education of the Nanjing Massacre? All these questions are unavoidable in the practice of history education of the Nanjing Massacre. The emotion of hatred is based on biological instincts developed during our social evolution and it plays a significant part in constructing the historical memory of the Nanjing Massacre, which should never be underestimated. Therefore, rationally understanding the emotion of hatred in the history education of the Nanjing Massacre, and offering correct guidance, is of great significance for remembering and developing a correct view of our history, forming a proper world view, and achieving the fundamental goal of cherishing and maintaining peace.

**Keywords:** Nanjing Massacre, hatred, emotion, memory, history education

“Remember history, not hatred,” a well-known saying of Ms. Li Xiuying, a survivor of the Nanjing Massacre. For the common needs of peace and development of mankind, we have always advocated remembering the history of the Nanjing Massacre, drawing lessons from its history, and promoting peace by leveraging the history of the massacre. Just as General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out at the first public sacrifice ceremony for victims of the Nanjing Massacre, “The purpose of the memorial ceremony for Nanjing Massacre victims is to recall that every good-hearted person yearns for and holds a firm stance of peace, but does not

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try to prolong hatred.” However, in the face of the atrocities committed by the Japanese invaders during the Nanjing Massacre, can we really let go of hatred? If so, how should this painful history be remembered? If not, how can it be channeled to make it part of our educational focus on peace? These are the unavoidable practical questions in the practice of history education of the Nanjing Massacre, and the common issues that must be confronted in the process of human development in the context of globalization.

## 1. Emotion of hatred: Historical memory of the Nanjing Massacre

The reason why we have a memorial for the Nanjing Massacre victims and carry out history education on the Nanjing Massacre is to remember this episode of our history, warn the future and maintain peace. But no how the subject is presented, the memory of the Nanjing Massacre produces the emotion of hatred which has been integrated into our collective memory as an objective reality. It is still fresh in the narration of many survivors. Survivor Liu Qingying recalled, “Two of my family members were slaughtered by the Japanese... Throughout the eight years when the Japanese were in China, they killed countless Chinese. Every Chinese hates the Japanese invaders. I would make descendants remember the grief, hostility and enmity” (Zhang & Zhang, 2006). In the memory of Nanjing Massacre, the emotion of hatred is an objective reality that no one can avoid.

As an important part of the historical memory of the Nanjing Massacre, the emotion of hatred is of great significance in remembering that history. Whether it is a historical memory that emphasizes historical facts or a cultural memory as a cultural phenomenon, I am afraid that it is not easy to only keep in mind the original feelings of the painful history of the massacre. All history is contemporary history (by Croce). As we continue to deepen our understanding of the history of the Nanjing Massacre, it is constantly being written and constructed. However, this normal historical construction is often used by people with ulterior motives. They select historical fragments to remember, and reconstruct and even subvert history through forgetting, obscuring, and reorganizing it. In order to maintain the historical truth, a “stabilizer” is needed to consolidate the historical memory. In the historical memory of the Nanjing Massacre, strong emotions represented by hatred just play such a role in that consolidation.

The strong emotions represented by hatred are an instinctive reaction to special events. Modern psychological research shows that whether a strong emotion can be created is one of the decisive factors in whether an event can be remembered by people. Strong emotions not only consolidate memories, but also make it easier to recall them. Moreover, compared with positive emotions such as pride and surprise, negative emotions like grief, anger and hatred make memories much easier to be recalled. Therefore, strong emotions like fear, hatred and sadness are always important tools in consolidating memory. It is precisely because of the important role in evoking and retaining memories that strong emotions are called “stabilizers” by German cultural scholar Alida Asman.

As a key part of the memory, strong emotions are of strong stability and not easily manipulated by the outside world. That has been confirmed in the course of the spread of many historical memories. Take the holocaust of the Jews by the Nazis during the Second World War as an example. For various reasons, both the injurers and the victims chose silence during the early post-war period. It was not until 1961 when Israel, seeking to establish its own legitimacy and win identity, carried out the Eichmann Trial that the historical facts of the Holocaust returned to the public's sight in a court debate arising furor. Similarly, the historical

dissemination of the Nanjing Massacre has gone through a similar process. The memory of the Nanjing Massacre also experienced a period of “quietness” right after the founding of the People’s Republic of China due to the international political need for Sino-Japanese good-neighborly and friendly relations. Until the Japanese “textbook incident” in 1982, the Japanese right-wing forces white-washed the war of aggression and played down the wartime atrocities. Their practices aroused strong dissatisfaction from the Chinese government and great indignation among the Chinese people. It is against such a backdrop that the Memorial Hall for the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders was opened in Nanjing in 1985. At the same time, active efforts have been made in academic circles on systematic research on the Nanjing Massacre.

Looking back at the similar experiences in historical dissemination of the Holocaust and the Nanjing Massacre, people cannot help but wonder, why those painful memories being silent all those years would become a hot topic in society at this moment. Is it because of the game of international politics or a historical opportunity brought about by one or two accidents? It seems that both are possible, but the fundamental reason is that no one having experienced that period of history can forget the pain they suffered and the resulting hatred of the perpetrators. It is exactly the strong emotions that turn all historical accidents into historical inevitability. That experience will never again be silent even without these opportunities. It is precisely because of the unique role of strong emotions in memory recall that these dust-laden past events could be recalled and unfolded in public.

As the stabilizer of memory, strong emotions play another key role, namely, they are a background and reference for historical research as pure emotional truths. The victims and witnesses of the suffering reacted with strong emotions which might cause their memories to deviate to some extent from the detailed historical facts, but the strong emotions they had when they experienced the pain and helplessness are incomparably real. As the French writer Marcel Proust put it, “All memories stored through sensory impressions are more unparalleled in directness and authenticity than those through language repetition” (Assmann, 2007). Compared with history that is constantly being constructed, reality based on strong emotional recall is an uncut truth, or an unconstructed truth. The reality of such emotions is often accompanied by the power of independence and resistance, free from the restriction of choice, and not necessarily being part of the collective memory, because its existence itself is a threat to the “functional memory” manipulated by power. Compared with historical truth, the emotional reality expressed by strong emotions is closer to the original state of life, and to social reality in anthropological research, being the backbone for resisting the premature ideologicalization in the historical writing and proof for ideological historical writing. When the Japanese “textbook incident” occurred in 1982, research on the history of the Nanjing Massacre in China was quite weak. It was exactly the indignation against the Japanese right-wing forces arbitrarily distorting history that strongly motivated research on such history to rapidly emerge and achieve fruitful results. It has become a powerful weapon against the Japanese right-wing’s fallacy. If we had turned a blind eye to the words and deeds of the Japanese right-wing forces who arbitrarily distorted history, then this history would probably be presented in a different way. In the history of mankind, how many historical truths are submerged in the ideologicalized historical writings dominated by choice, concealing, misinterpretation, and forgetting? Fortunately, today we still have the strong power generated by strong emotions.

Undeniably, the existence of strong emotions is inherently flawed. The continuation of emotions is often based on the existence of biological meaning and on social interactions and passed from generation

to generation as part of collective memory. In his theory of cultural memory, German scholar Jan Assmann called collective memory “communicative short-term memory,” referring to the “new past,” which is a shared memory with the same generation or at most not more than three or four generations. Such kind of memory originates from interpersonal communications in daily life, mainly based on verbal inheritance, and dies with the passing of the inheritor. If the “communicative short-term memory” is to break through the limitations of time and pass from generation to generation, it is necessary to go through the process of symbolization and become a “cultural long-term memory,” that is, a cultural memory. A cultural memory is related to the absolute past. The myths and legends of human origin as an example, are a highly solidified, symbolized and symbolic text system, image system and ritual system, and the cultural memory was generated synchronously with the emergence and development of human culture (Assmann & Assmann. 2012). In the same way, if the historical memory of the Nanjing Massacre is to be inherited for generations and always remembered, it must undergo a process of symbolization, and the connecting of strong emotions with media such as texts, rituals, celebrations, and architecture to solidify and convert the event from a collective memory to a cultural memory. This is well reflected in the self-deepening process of the research on the Holocaust by the Nazis. From the “war behavior” in the initial “event theory” to “anti-Semitism,” “genocide,” and then to “anti-humanity,” the Holocaust by the Nazis turned from “a specific event that occurred in a specific historical context, an event symbolizing national and ethnic hatred, violence and war into a universal symbol of human suffering and moral degradation” (Alexander. 2011). This de-contextualized process of symbolic construction is the process of the the Holocaust by the Nazis turning from a collective memory to a cultural memory. In fact, that is also the process that the historical memory of the Nanjing Massacre is going through.

To remember the history of the Nanjing Massacre, we must fully understand the key role of the emotion of hatred in evoking and retaining memory, and extend the historical memory of the Nanjing Massacre to the cultural and academic fields, transforming the historical memory of the Nanjing Massacre into the common cultural memory of mankind. Only in such a way can we pass on the historical memory of the Nanjing Massacre from generation to generation.

## 2. The real rationality for the existence of hatred and its dual functions

Although as an objective existence, the emotion of hatred has been integrated with the historical memory of the Nanjing Massacre. Yet, while we have been advocating the idea of “taking history as a mirror” and “not to continue the hatred” in the history education on the Nanjing Massacre, we always regard it and criticize it as a negative emotion. But in fact, the emotion of hatred not only objectively exists, but is also a psychological reaction of human beings based on biological instincts. Its realistic rationality in biology and sociology is beyond doubt. At the same time, the negative effect of negative emotions, such as the emotion of hatred, in social life is not to be underestimated.

Undeniably, the emotion of hatred is generated on a biological basis, with obvious rationality. When we are attacked and our survival is threatened, we will instinctively generate emotions such as anger and hatred, which in turn prompt us to defend ourselves and fight back to maintain our biological individual existence. That is the most legitimate and true defensive instinctive response of humans to a crisis of survival. “It is rooted in the reflex motion and the irritability of living tissues. Without such an instinct, life would not exist.

In higher animals like humans, such an instinct has changed, but it still exists” (Gugau. 1994). Such defensive responsiveness equips us with the ability of self-defense and counterattack in times when we are being attacked, thus being a deterrent against the attacker and protecting ourselves in the end. It is an evolutionary advantage that we have retained in our long evolutionary course. Without such an ability, we would probably be already extinct.

From the perspective of sociology, the emotion of hatred of people in the face of sin is the root and foundation of our penal systems. Its positive role in social development is beyond doubt. Not just being reasonable and normal, the emotion of hatred of people facing sin needs to be protected and strongly advocated. Hatred means condemnation and rejection of sins, containing a meaning of recognition of the current order. The rejection of criminal acts that violate human nature and infringe the legitimate rights and interests of others and the condemnation of perpetrators are prerequisites for maintaining the current order of society, safeguarding human rights, and promoting the healthy development of human societies. According to the relevant research on the purpose of penalty, there are two main purposes for human beings to establish a penal system. One is “retaliation” and the other is “prevention.”<sup>①</sup> The object of “retaliation” is the perpetrators. Following the philosophy of “reap what one sows,” the national penal systems are applied to punish the perpetrators in a “violence must be met by violence” way to maintain social order and ensure social fairness and justice. In addition to punishing the evil and promoting the good, another important purpose is to “prevent” criminal behaviors. The famous Italian criminologist Beccaria pointed out, “The purpose of penalty is neither to afflict a persecutor nor to eliminate the crimes already committed. ... the purpose of the penalty is simply to prevent the perpetrator from re-infringing on other citizens, and admonish other people not to repeat the same mistakes” (Beccaria, 1993). “Retaliation” of criminals and crime prevention are the two important purposes of the penal system, which actually correspond to the two basic forms of hatred, namely hatred to criminals and hatred to crimes.

Hatred to criminals and hatred to crimes are the two main forms of the emotion of hatred. And the negative effects of the emotion of hatred are mainly the hatred to the perpetrators. The hatred to the perpetrator in the penal system corresponds to the “retaliated” punishment for the perpetrator. It is generally believed that distinguishing between the good and the evil is an ability that human beings must possess and is the basic reason that we are called human. Everyone has the responsibility and obligation to ensure his or her behaviors free from harm to the interests of society and others. If they violate that rule, it is only natural to be punished. It is based on the cognition that “retaliated” punishment has been allowed and advocated for a long time in human history, which objectively caused the generalization of the subjects of hatred and the escalation of the emotion of hatred. It even gave birth to a culture of torture in the history of mankind.

At all times and in all over the world, in order to vent their hatred against criminals, people’s “intelligence and wisdom” were given fully play to, having invented various kinds of torture and even formed a cultural phenomenon of torture. Although the culture of torture has undergone tremendous changes in modern society with the development of social rationality and the progress of human civilization, it is an indisputable fact

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① There are three main views on the purpose of punishment in Western theories of criminal jurisprudence. One is the retribution penal theory, also known as the theory of revenge. The second is the prevention penal theory, and the third is the theory of compromise, proposing to remove the partiality of the first two theories and compromise.

that the culture of torture has enjoyed a massive base since ancient times. Whenever torture is carried out, it is always like an all-citizen carnival. People would be almost crazy, vying to “eat the flesh and sleep on the skin of the perpetrator.” That abnormal way of venting hatred can certainly play a role in shocking criminals, curbing crime, and maintaining the current order of society. However, it is another form of evil that tramples on human dignity and restricts human progress. To suppress evil with evil can only lead to the escalation of evil and greater opposition and hatred.

The realistic rationality for the emotion of hatred to exist is obvious to all, especially its positive effects in terms of curbing crimes and maintaining social stability. It is difficult to imagine that in a society that turns a blind eye to sin, the right to human survival and development can be effectively guaranteed. People often feel bitter about the indifference among people in modern society and the self-preservation and insensitivity to sin, but only demand that we forget the hatred in the face of the tragic death of the victims of the Nanjing Massacre and the atrocities committed by the Japanese invaders. It is unfair. However, given the two-sided nature of the emotion of hatred, we must give play to its positive side and correctly guide its negative effects.

### 3. Emotion guidance in the history education of the Nanjing Massacre

The emotion of hatred was deeply rooted in the Nanjing Massacre right after its occurrence, and has been integrated with the historical memory of the massacre. It is unrealistic to only memorize the history and remove the emotion of hatred. Therefore, given the two-sided nature of the emotion of hatred, how we could properly guide it is a problem that must be fixed in the history education of the Nanjing Massacre.

To remember the event is the primary task of the history education of the Nanjing Massacre. In order to remember such history, we need to continue the hatred for the crime itself, rather than to the perpetrators. There is a fundamental difference between them. Before discussing this issue, it is necessary to clarify these two closely related concepts.

Hatred signifies rejection and exclusion. If the object of hatred is the perpetrator of sin, then the hatred tends to show complex tendencies. If it is against the crime itself, it shows more rejection to crimes. That is the intensity of hatred against sinful behavior is inversely proportional to the possibility of recurrence of the behavior. On the contrary, if the object of hatred is the perpetrator, it is more likely to be “an eye for an eye” result, and the intensity of hatred and the possibility of recurrence of crimes might be directly proportional.

For the purpose of defending human peace and justice, we need always maintain the hatred to criminal behaviors, oppose the suppression of violence with violence, and advocate the settlement of conflicts and disputes via friendly negotiations, to safeguard world peace. That is the goal of the history education of the Nanjing Massacre. For the history education of the holocaust, we did not distinguish between the objects of hatred, the perpetrator and the crime itself, or the distinction was unclear. In fact, such a distinction is not always easy, because in criminology, the subjects of crimes and criminal behaviors are important components of the crimes. They are often inseparable. However, as an educational concept and deferring to the particularity of the history education of the Nanjing Massacre, such a distinction has become essentially necessary and urgent.

The lack of a distinction or an unclear distinction between the two objects of hatred directly leads to the confusion of the two hatreds, or the infinite expansion of hatred to the perpetrators, the hatred of the crimes

replaced by the hatred of the perpetrators, and the reflection of the crime itself replaced by the accusations and indignation to the invaders. Therefore, for a long period of time, many literary and film works on the history of the Nanjing Massacre only focused on displaying the brutality of the Japanese army, such as the movie *Nanjing Massacre* and the *City of Life and Death*. Despite some reflections in them, the expressions of national sentiments with obvious tendencies throughout the films tended to weaken the power of the works to objectively present history. As a result, the audience only remembers the hatred to the Japanese invaders. It is under the influence of such narrative structures that the hatred to the perpetrators has almost become a value orientation concealing everything. Especially on the Internet, hateful speeches are rampant and even used by lawbreakers as a tool to undermine social stability.

In the history education of the Nanjing Massacre, the primary task of emotional guidance is to guard against the generalization of hatred against criminals. Such a generalization is mainly in the way of expansion of the objects of hate and the extremalization of how to express the hatred. In such history education, the expansion of the objects to hate is most typically in the form of extending the hatred of the Japanese invaders to the hatred of all Japanese, extending the hatred to contemporary Japanese militarism and right-wing forces to hatred of all Japanese nationals, including just and friendly people, and even believing that the Japanese have been cruel since ancient times. This extreme understanding directly leads to extreme expressions of hatred, such as spreading extreme remarks, attacking and insulting friendly Japanese, and smashing Japanese-run stores and Japanese-made cars. This generalization of hatred, except for temporary emotional venting, provides little help for solving practical problems and only escalates hatred and opposition. It greatly hurts the feelings of friendly and ordinary Japanese, is not conducive to reflecting on history or uniting the forces that can be united to safeguard world peace.

As time goes by, we may be able to forgive the perpetrators, but we must always maintain the hatred of sinful behavior. Letting go of the hatred to the perpetrators is an important manifestation of “post-holocaust” humanity. “The post-holocaust humanity is a post-disaster humanity. It is a self-adjustment in a new historical context after a huge humanitarian catastrophe. The catastrophe puts people in a huge and real sense of absurdity. The post-holocaust humanity is the effort to re-establish the value of human existence after such sense of absurdity is gone” (Xu, 2008). In today's highly developed society and process of accelerating globalization, to adapt to the development of the times, we choose not to forget, not to hover, but to blend into society and face the future. However, even if we let go of the hatred of perpetrators, it does not mean that we can give up hatred of the crimes, because this is a matter of the common destiny and future of all mankind.

Always retaining the hatred of criminal behaviors is an important goal of the history education of the Nanjing Massacre. To unfold the most realistic picture of the criminal acts of the Japanese army like massacre, rape and robbery of the public is a key assignment of the history education of the massacre. There is no ground for blame. We cannot question the rationality of it because it may lead to the generalization of the hatred of perpetrators, but we must also clearly understand that in the process of presenting history, we must pay special attention to the choice of methods to avoid the independence of language and narrative structure deviating from the education goals. At the same time, we must also realize that reviewing historical facts is only the first step in the history education of the Nanjing Massacre. After that, it is necessary to instruct the educators in the conception of history, outlook on life and world view. Only in such a way can we eventually achieve the goal of peace through education. If there is only historical studies lacking correct guidance, then the history



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education of the Nanjing Massacre will descend to an education that teaches only hate for perpetrators.

Then how should we guide the students in the history education of the Nanjing Massacre to let go of their hate for the perpetrators and maintain their hate for the criminal behavior? It is a social issue involving political, economic, cultural and other factors, requiring the participation of multiple forces in society.

The history education of the Nanjing Massacre is ultimately a kind of education on the conceptions of history and the world view. It is a kind of empathetic experiential education that leverages individual attention to a future destiny. However, such kind of experiential education can easily deviate from the goal if it is not properly guided. Individuals predicate the future via knowledge of the past and present, and the attitude of the public towards “now” is a centralized manifestation of future demand. In the face of criminal behaviors, the public often has a strong sense of empathy, tending to imagine that they are the victim of such behaviors and hate the perpetrators in a personal way. This kind of hatred is not wrong, but the object of the hatred should be the injurer of the future. If the hatred to potential injurers in the future is also imposed on the current injurers, it is obviously unfair. The only way to change this situation is to convince the public that this evil will not happen in the future and that they will not become a victim. Only in that way can the public make a fair and rational judgment on the actual perpetrators.

At present, the lack of depth of the history education of the Nanjing Massacre is certainly one of the reasons behind the rounds of anti-Japanese sentiments. However, the fundamental point is that the Japanese right-wing forces continue to distort history and deny the facts, greatly increasing the public’s sense of insecurity for the future and leading to blindness and expansion of hatred against the perpetrators. According to a survey in 2005 on the awareness of the Nanjing Massacre, 82.2% of respondents believed that Japanese militarism will return, and China should always be vigilant against Japan; 83.1% believed that the Japanese

government's attitude towards the massacre is the cause why people dislike Japan. For the future of Sino-Japanese relations, 21.5% are convinced that there will be more conflicts, relations will gradually deteriorate, and even war will break out. Only 2.8% of them considered the prospects to be bright, and even 24.4% think that history should be kept firmly in mind so we can take revenge on the Japanese someday (Li & Shi, 2005). Thus it can be seen that to realize the rational and fair view of hatred requires the joint efforts of the Chinese and Japanese governments and the people of both countries.

The issue of hatred has always been a sensitive topic for both the history education of the Nanjing Massacre and the Sino-Japanese relations. Both sides feel it is necessary to give vent to their pent-up feelings. Acknowledgement of the existence of hatred will lead to opposition, but not to acknowledge it would be questioned as ignoring the elephant in the room, so they always cover up, hesitating in determining what to say. What history should we remember, what hatred should we abandon and what peaceful vision should we construct? All are issues we cannot avoid in the history education of the Nanjing Massacre. In such history, we should study the issues of hatred with a more rational mindset. We need to admit the rationality of the emotion of hatred as a human distinct biological construct and its positive role in social development. On the premise of fully recognizing the key role strong emotions like hatred as a stabilizer of memory in remembering the Nanjing Massacre, we need to correctly guide such emotions, especially the emotion of hatred, in a classified way in the deeper study of it to help people let go of the hatred of the perpetrators while continuing their hatred of the sinful acts, and hopefully prevent the recurrence of such inhumane tragedies.

Compared with the international Holocaust education (educating leveraging holocaust of Jews by Nazis), the history education of the Nanjing Massacre started relatively late. The 2015 Nanjing Massacre Archives is included in the Memory of the World Register by UNESCO, which raises new and higher requirements for the history education of the Nanjing Massacre. In the face of an increasingly complex international situation and the common crisis of survival faced by mankind in the process of globalization, the history education of the Nanjing Massacre must expand its thinking and conform to the trend of the peaceful development of human society, to educate the public from the perspective of humanity and human co-development and peaceful coexistence. Only in this way can we avoid the deviations in the history education of the Nanjing Massacre and keep such education aligned with the correct direction of worldview education and peace education.

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