Traumatic Memory and Social Identity: The Public Construction of the Nanjing Massacre's Historical Recognition

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Abstract: The Nanjing Massacre is an unmentionable World War II memory. Haunted by such a typical traumatic memory, the victims of the Nanjing Massacre are experiencing a social identity crisis which is subtle but should by no means be overlooked. There is no shortage of "national humiliation" arguments lamenting for their misfortune and raging over their servility. Yet at the same time, there are also face-saving attempts to deliberately amplify the Chinese people's resistance during the Massacre. These are all modern representations of the social identity crisis facing the victims of the Nanjing Massacre. 2017 marked the 80th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre. Those who have not experienced that holocaust tend to blame the victims' lack of resistance spirit. Fundamentally, such criticism roots in no appropriate access to the real situation of the Nanjing Massacre and the extreme helplessness of those victims in the face of death. The underestimation of the power of extreme situations leads to the above fundamental attribution error. Therefore, China must construct a shared traumatic memory to secure the most extensive possible social identity for the victims of the Nanjing Massacre.

Keywords: Nanjing Massacre; traumatic memory; social identity; historical recognition

Traumatic memory refers to a physical or psychological trauma caused by a severe emergency or catastrophe which is beyond individual bearing capacity. Originally, the study of traumatic memory was mainly restricted to the psychological area. In recent years, with building a community of common

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destiny becoming pervasive, people begin to reflect traumatic memories such as war, massacre, nuclear explosion and terrorist attack from a macro-perspective of all mankind. Consequently, the study of traumatic memory is extended from the psychological area to the areas of culture, sociology, history, philosophy, etc. Particularly in cultural studies, traumatic memory has become an important research topic to help interpret national cultural psychology and review the development of society.

The Nanjing Massacre is an unmentionable traumatic memory from World War II. Being a major traumatic memory of the Chinese nation, the Nanjing Massacre has already transcended individual memory and has integrated into this nation's collective memory, which gradually forms an indelible cultural trauma in the Chinese nation's collective unconsciousness. Cultural trauma tends to be accompanied with the change of social identity. That is to say, "cultural trauma occurs when certain group members feel they have experienced a horrible event, which leaves an indelible scar on their group consciousness, develops into a permanent memory and fundamentally and irreversibly changes future identities" (Xu, 2008, p.276). Alongside such a cultural trauma is the emergence of a social identity crisis. Haunted by such a typical traumatic memory, the victims of the Nanjing Massacre are experiencing a social identity crisis which is subtle but should by no means be overlooked. The fundamental solution to this problem lies in constructing a trauma memory of the Nanjing Massacre shared by all mankind.

1. Modern representations of the social identity crisis facing the victims of the Nanjing Massacre

According to the written judgment made by the International Military Tribunals for the Far East against the Japanese criminals in World War II, from mid-December 1937 to early 1938, a total of 300,000 Chinese soldiers and civilians were killed by the Japanese army during the Nanjing Massacre. Eighty years on, as its national strength keeps increasing, China once again examines this part of history with renewed interpretations of both the injuring and the injured. Subtle changes do occur in the public attitude towards those who died in or survived the Massacre, indicating a subtle yet not-to-be-overlooked social identity crisis among the victims of the Nanjing Massacre. Such a social identity crisis is often demonstrated in a hidden and roundabout way. Without appropriate guidance, this crisis will surely generate a significant negative impact on society.

When it comes to the Nanjing Massacre narration, typical expression goes like this, "The Nanjing Massacre is not only a misfortune, but also a shame. That our compatriots were killed like domestic animals mirrors the cowardliness and numbness of the Chinese people, as well as the cruelty and brutality of the invaders. And it is our own cowardliness and numbness that allowed the enemies' brutality and their contempt for us" (Li, 2011). Such a "national humiliation" argument, which "laments for their misfortune and rages over their servility," remains pervasive and representative for a long period of time, and is a modern representation of the social identity crisis facing the victims of the Nanjing Massacre. To some extent, this argument rashly attributes the occurrence of the Nanjing Massacre to the "cowardliness and numbness of our people." This bold view in fact cannot withstand in-depth reasoning.

According to American thinker Ralph Waldo Emerson, victims cannot be tarnished, which is in fact not always true. Throughout human history, putting the victims to blame is not rare. In the early days of the State of Israel, to gain legitimacy for their

newly established country, Zionists enthusiastically advocated the courageous spirit of ancient Jews and simply could not understand why six million Jews on the European Continent were slaughtered like lambs by the Nazis without any attempt of resistance during World War II. The cowardliness and weakness they demonstrated was regarded as a shame of the Israelites by the Zionists. On the other hand, the physical and psychological weakness exhibited by those narrowly-escaped Jews seem to have proved such a view and therefore exacerbated society's contempt and disgust for the survivors of the Holocaust. For European Jews who survived the Holocaust, their suffering became a shame, which they could do nothing to erase. To continue their life and adapt themselves to society as soon as possible, many of those survivors were forced to keep silent and even deliberately "forget" that experience. For quite a long period of time following World War II, European Jews who had been tortured to death were not duly commemorated, or were even "forgotten." This was similar to the temporary "dreariness" of the Nanjing Massacre memory after World War II. Thus, it can be seen, a post-trauma social identity crisis is not an individual case but a common phenomenon. This is particularly true of the traumatic psychic reaction-initiated "defense period,"[①] during which evasion, denial and withdrawal are all normal psychological reactions. It is an inevitable stage that the traumatic subjects, including the witnesses and the entire society, must undergo.

Apart from the abovementioned "national shame" argument, another modern representation of a social identity crisis facing the victims of the Nanjing Massacre is the deliberate amplification of their resistance. Such a representation tends to be more complicated and covert. For a long time, there has been a view that the Nanjing Massacre witnessed "the coexistence of massacre and resistance, and the contrast of shame and glory" (Sun, 2005, p.277). Admittedly, during the Massacre there were heroic deeds, which became an important part of the memory in Nanjing Massacre. For example, Li Xiuying kept fighting with Japanese soldiers after he had suffered over 30 stabs; Liang Zhicheng refused to drive for Japanese soldiers and launched a desperate struggle with them. Yet, overall "during the Massacre military and civilian resistance in Nanjing was not massive, but uncommon, dispersive and unorganized." Under some circumstances, the lack of fierce mass resistance among the Chinese soldiers and civilians in Nanjing during the Massacre may leave the wrong impression of "awaiting their doom" (Ma & Xing, 2007). In recent years, with increased academic attention paid to the Nanjing Massacre studies, there seems to be a tendency to amplify the Chinese people's resistance during the Massacre. Some scholars argue that the courageousness of the Chinese nation can only be embodied by a mass resistance against the invaders. Even if there was no such thing as a mass resistance in reality, China should still amplify that resistance so as to safeguard its national pride. Such a view seems to recognize the worthy deaths of the Nanjing Massacre victims but is in fact blaming them in a disguised form. This groundless recognition, which

① According to relevant psychological studies, post–traumatic psychological process mainly comprises four stages, i.e. shock, reaction, working through and processing, as well as reorientation. The first stage "shock" comes right after the occurrence of a crisis, when the traumatic subject feels shocked and panic, and does not know what to do. The second stage is reaction (defense and withdrawal), i.e. the traumatic subject's irrational use of means such as denial, withdrawal or evasion to cope with severe trauma beyond their bearing capacity and recover peace of mind as soon as possible. Such means, however, can deliver nothing but negative impact. The third stage, namely, working through and processing, involves active application of various methods to solve the problem, boost confidence and resume social functions. Post–traumatic psychological process ends with the fourth stage–reorientation, in which those who have survived a crisis may grow more mature both in mind and in behavior and develop a more positive attitude towards life; or may become negative and even suffer multiple mental disorders.

The Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders

is against objective fact, is a representation of an even more profound identity crisis. It is no different from people's stress responses (dodge, denial, withdrawal, etc.) to trauma and is an improper projection of national pride, which is echoed to the extreme by the emergence of "ridiculous anti-Japanese aggression dramas."

This newly emerged TV series genre has been popular over the past years and completely turned the established objective cognition of the "anti-Japanese aggression memory" upside down. Ignoring historical facts, such "ridiculous anti-Japanese aggression dramas" have significantly downplayed the toughness, duration and cruelty of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and absurdly represented their 14-year-long resistance in the form of "tearing Japanese soldiers apart with bare hands." To the surprise of many people, these "ridiculous anti-Japanese aggression dramas," however sensational and distorted they may be, enjoy fairly high ratings. While criticizing their distortion of history, the public shows great tolerance to this TV genre. This seemingly self-contradicting attitude is facilitated by the current "entertainment first" atmosphere and rooted in the fact that such dramas cater to the Chinese people's wishes to get rid themselves of the stigma brought about by the war trauma and to rebuild national pride and confidence. Different from a victory-related memory, traumatic memory can impair collective identity, national pride and a sense of belonging. Given this, the more people feel

close to a traumatic memory, the more they tend to keep away from it and reconstruct the past by means of denial and dodging. This is a typical mechanism of psychological defense and self-protection. The increasingly strong denial and dodging highlights the severe social traumatic crisis that the subject suffers and a pressing need to construct a new social identity.

2. Root cause and consequences of the social identity crisis facing the victims of the Nanjing Massacre

The social identity crisis facing the victims of the Nanjing Massacre is the outcome of social development. Exploring its root cause is of great significance for the correct understanding of the traumatic memory of the Nanjing Massacre and the reconstruction of the victims' social identity.

From the representation of the social identity crisis facing the victims of the Nanjing Massacre, it is not difficult to discover that all blame revolves around one point: Why there was no mass military and civilian resistance against the Japanese army during the Massacre?

It has been 80 years since the Nanjing Massacre and there are not many survivors and witnesses still alive today. For those who did not experience that catastrophe, their doubts root in no appropriate access to the real situation of the Nanjing Massacre and the extreme helplessness of those victims in the face of death. Their underestimation of the power of the situation in extreme cases leads to a fundamental attribution error.

Regarding the real situation of the Nanjing Massacre and the extreme helplessness of the victims in the face of the Massacre, there are a large number of detailed records kept by Chinese and Japanese organizations, as well as other third-party organizations. Among those depictions is the recall of the Massacre survivor Cao Qilan, who lived at Pukou, Nanjing. Looking back at the Japanese army's atrocity over 60 years ago, Cao still felt terrified and helpless. "I was so scared of the Japanese soldiers that I dared not cry when seeing my second oldest brother killed. It is such a painful memory. How I wish to kill those Japanese soldiers. Deep inside, I have always hated the Japanese, yet at the same time I have been so scared of them. There is simply no way out" (Zhang, 2006, p.273).

On December 13, 1937, Nakajima Kesago, regimental commander of the Japanese army's 16th division, wrote in his diary, "We basically ignored the captive policy and decided to wipe out all captives. Given that they were captured in groups of one thousand, five thousand or even ten thousand soldiers, we cannot immediately disarm them all. Even so, they have completely lost their will to fight and just numbly came in groups, forming no threat to us at all" (The Editorial Committee of the Nanjing War History, 1993, p.220). A similar account was also given by the Japanese soldier Osawa Kazuo, who then served in the second troop of the 33rd regiment of the infantry. He recalled, "The city gate was wide open, inside which there were a large number of remnant soldiers. Perhaps because of such a hopeless situation, they successively raised their arms in surrender—We fetched barrels of gasoline and poured it down onto them from the city gate tower. Those Chinese seemed to have given up hope, standing there still. When they were on fire, some of them did make a futile attempt to escape, only to find them in smoke without fierce struggle".

In addition to the historical data kept by the Chinese and Japanese, there were also countless diaries and letters written by Westerners then living in Nanjing depicting the extreme helplessness of the disarmed Chinese soldiers. On December 15, 1937, John Heinrich Detlef Rabe, a German businessman and president of the International Committee for

the Nanjing Safety Zone, wrote a letter to Fukuda Tokuyasu, then diplomat at the Japanese Embassy in China, asking Japan to adhere to the principle of humanitarianism and be kind to Chinese captives. In his letter, Rabe depicted how helpless those nowhere-to-hide Chinese soldiers were in the city of Nanjing, "The International Committee for the Nanjing Safety Zone is deeply shocked by the misery of those already disarmed Chinese soldiers. Right from the very beginning, the Committee has worked hard to ensure no Chinese soldier was in the Safety Zone. Until the afternoon of December 13 everything had worked as planned. However, during that very afternoon, a few hundred Chinese soldiers approached and eventually entered the Safety Zone. They pleaded with us for help out of despair" (John Heinrich Detlef Rabe, 1997, p.180).

Judging from the abovementioned historical data, the despair and helplessness of the Chinese soldiers and civilians was beyond verbal description. Under such extremely desperate circumstances, the soldiers guarding the city "completely lost the will to fight" and "gave up hope, standing there still." With their enemies much better equipped and trained, the Chinese army could not compete with them on the battlefield, let alone after being captured. It is from such a strong sense of powerlessness that they "learned" helplessness. Learned helplessness refers to the instinctive reaction of humans and animals that have experienced adverse events beyond their control (Myers, 2016, p.58). As proved by Martin Seligman's famous experiment①, in which caged dogs lost the courage to resist when realizing they could never avoid the electric shock no matter how hard they tried. The result of this experiment indicates that be it human or animal, extreme circumstance can deprive one of the courage to resist, which is understandable and therefore should not be blamed. Some may argue that learned helplessness can be overcome through individual efforts and that the Nanjing Massacre victims' failure to start a mass resistance exposed their weak will. There is no denial that learned helplessness in daily life can be overcome through "systematic management" of personal control. However, this capacity must be based on individuals' certain rights to control and choose. Evidently, this does not apply to the victims under extreme circumstances such as war and massacre.

Excessive blame on the victims of the Nanjing Massacre for their lack of resistance highlights people's fundamental attribution error, which is due to their underestimation of the power of a situation in extreme cases. Culture may form the most significant force that influences human behavior at the macro level, while social situations are arguably among the major factors that manipulate it at the micro level. In each social situation and under the restriction of a social norm, people unconsciously develop a conformist mentality and tend to be more obedient to authoritative and mandatory discourse. A social situation may turn ordinary people into slaughterers, as well as reward virtue and punish vice. Given that, when analyzing and interpreting a social phenomenon or a human behavior, one must sensibly take the power of the social situation

① American psychologist Seligman conducted serial experiments with dogs. Experiment 1: He put a dog into a cage equipped with electric-shock device and then discovered that when the dog was shocked, it struggled desperately to escape from the cage. After repeated failures, however, its struggle gradually scaled down. Experiment 2: He put that dog, which had just been electrically shocked into a cage with half area electrified and the other half not, and then discovered that the dog passively endured electric shock in despair without any attempt to escape. Experiment 3: He put some dogs, which had no prior experience of electric shock into the second cage and discovered that all of them could easily escape from the electrified side to the other safe side. Seligman named the desperate mentality of the first dog "learned helplessness," which in fact also applies to humans. According to Seligman, to avoid "learned helplessness," a dog needs to be taught how to avoid being electrically shocked before it is taken in that "unavoidable electric shock" experiment. Thus, dogs were put into the second cage (with half area electrically neutral) to learn how to escape from electric shock. Having learnt such a skill, they were taken in the first experiment. The result proved that those dogs were less likely to acquire "learned helplessness."

into consideration, and avoid any exaggeration, underestimation or neglect of it.

Regarding the explanation of individual human behavior, there are two patterns of attribution, i.e. internal attribution (personality attribution) and external attribution (situation attribution). Also, the process of attribution is usually accompanied with self-serving bias. Human analysis is a process of self-serving attribution to maximize self-interests. More specifically, people tend to attribute their positive results such as success and honor to internal factor, i.e. their own excellent qualities, and attribute their negative results, such as failure and setback to external factor, i.e. the objective condition. Given that objective condition is beyond their control, they can avoid personal responsibility for those negative results. When it comes to negative results delivered by others, however, people adopt an entirely different pattern of attribution. Related research findings indicate that the "observers," well aware of others' suffering and their futility to offer significant help, tend to disapprove or even belittle the sufferers and attribute their tragedy to internal factors, i.e. their own fault. This is based on a so-called "just world" hypothesis, which is the assumption that a person's actions are inherently inclined to "bring morally fair and fitting consequences to that person," to the end of all noble actions being eventually rewarded and all evil actions eventually punished. For example, according to this hypothesis, poverty must result from laziness and idleness; the suffering of territorial invasion or massacre can only happen to a people who are inherently cowardly and incompetent.

There is a tendency to think that "China's being invaded and torn apart was mainly attributed to itself and its people. The link is robust and cannot be relieved, even a little bit, no matter what excuses there may be. It is the Chinese people themselves that could save them from sufferings, make them stronger, give them dignity and lead the country revive again" (Jin, 1995). The age of peace we are now in sees our faith in a "just world" being intensified as we take pride in the prosperity of our country, for we believe that we have earned all the things through diligence and wisdom and deserve what we have. The "just world" assumption, however, also holds that China was invaded and its people were slaughtered only because they "asked for" and "deserved" it by not being strong but instead being numb and cowardly. This logic of a "just world," quite similar to the law of the jungle namely "the weak are meat; the strong do eat," deserves credit for prompting a nation or a country's sense of crisis and helping to build a national spirit of always striving for greatness. However, the so-called "just world" hypothesis drastically underestimates the uncontrollable factors of the society by not fully acknowledging the ferocity of the Japanese army in the Nanjing Massacre, nor truly understanding how hopeless and helpless the victims felt when being killed. That either directly or indirectly leads to the attribution error of the Nanjing Massacre, as well as a social identity crisis facing the victims.

All histories are contemporary, for human interpretation of past occurrences is all based on contemporary values, attitudes towards history and cognitive standards. All the memories there are shaped by judgment here, being past behaviors that are reconstructed by attitudes at present. The image of victims of the Nanjing Massacre, as a reminder of this most typical traumatic memory, somehow does not match up with the hard-working, brave, undaunted and always-striving-for-greatness national spirit that China is currently making efforts to build and advocate. Naturally the need to maintain the national dignity and enhance national confidence might lead to spontaneous attempts to reconstruct this painful memory, to overstate the defying acts of Chinese civilians and soldiers and to try to ease the pain by making things a bit brighter. That easily

explains why there are so many "ridiculous anti-Japanese aggression dramas" occupying the TV screen these days.

In a manner of speaking, reconstruction of a historical or even a cultural memory is not rare in human history, and is well justified, for it serves as a most effective way to prove the legitimacy of the subject and win it the widest possible social identity. It is true that this kind of reconstruction is helpful for the formation of good values and attitudes towards history, but in the case of the Nanjing Massacre, it is not a good choice, for despite its role in maintaining national dignity and confidence, it will blur the focus of history, reduce the warning effect of the Nanjing Massacre on human's life and peaceful development, and strengthen the social identity crisis the victims are suffering.

3. Social identity and public construction in the historical recognition of the Nanjing Massacre

To reconstruct the social identity of the victims is a crucial task for education on the history of the Nanjing Massacre. There is a strong sense of alienation that exists when the modern symptoms and the causes of the social identity crisis facing the Nanjing Massacre victims are studied. People both experience and observe this historical disaster; they are both "victims" that suffer so much and "judges" that claim the moral. The arbitrary alternation between the two roles, on the one hand, projects anxiety and helplessness brought by a traumatic memory, and on the other hand implies that the social identity and public construction in the historical recognition of the Nanjing Massacre must proceed from two perspectives: victims and onlookers.

Using the victim identity to gain social identity must avoid or overcome two mindsets: an excessive sense of shame and a victim mentality.

The sense of shame is an emotional experience that occurs when a person feels his behavior is inappropriate and attributes the negative consequence to his own lack of abilities. A moderate sense of shame proves helpful for the self-formation of morality, prompting individuals to adjust to universal moral standards and regulate their acts. However, too great a sense of shame means disaster. Social psychologists note that a sense of shame is the most negative emotion that invariably invites self-depreciation. The sense of shame cuts short all positive emotions like joy and enterprise and replaces them with negative emotions like retreating and restraining. Worse still, the sense of shame is insidious, accumulative and chronic. Moderate, it would be normal psychological reaction; too intense, or even affecting self-evaluation, it would lead to too much self-criticism and anger or even assault on the world and other people.

Some studies show that "As time goes on, the Nanjing citizens, in their memory of the Nanjing Massacre, are transcending their original inclination towards revenge, which has given way to a sort of self-accusation and sense of self-dependence spurred by the faith that 'Lagging behind leaves one vulnerable to attacks'"(Zhang, 2003). "Being brave after feeling ashamed" is good news, but over-interpretation of the sense of shame because of the Nanjing Massacre might burden the victims with so much emotional pressure that it could possibly result in negative, revengeful emotions, which are sure to threaten social stability and hamper peaceful development of society. In fact, there is nothing terrible about the sense of shame. It is how people face up to it that matters. Freedom from it requires self-understanding, self-forgiveness and self-encouragement based on an objective historical understanding. It is impossible for people to be proud of their painful experiences, but it might

be healthy if they could view those experiences as a challenging test for the Chinese nation on its path to growth. What's worthy of pride is that, it is those very painful experiences that have taught the Chinese to fight their way out of darkness and let them know that only through relentless striving could they achieve the great rejuvenation.

Social identity is a process of categorization. When it comes to self-categorization people today, who have never experienced a devastating disaster firsthand might prefer to define themselves as victims of the Nanjing Massacre in broad terms, namely "the injured party," and review or comment on the painful history through the lens of "an injured party." The identity, whether of the victims or survivors, was an "injured party" of the Nanjing Massacre. This has been widely recognized by the international community, and can never be doubted either in objective or subjective terms. However, the injured of the Nanjing Massacre must try to avoid assuming a "victim mentality," which is an unhealthy psychological state in which one spontaneously regards himself or herself as the victim, and a self-defense mechanism that one takes in the face of a social identity crisis to shake off the sense of shame and responsibility. There are no necessary links between the "victim mentality" and the "victim" though. Some victims might deal with wounds with a positive attitude and never develop a "victim mentality," while others, even if they are not actual victims, could end up intentionally defining themselves as victims during the self-categorization process and finally make that tendency a personal trait. Therefore the "victim mentality" is, to a large extent, a choice made by people themselves. Those with such a mentality are often characterized by negative attributes, such as lack of introspection, excessive defense and being too revengeful. They stubbornly believe they are the real victims, claim the moral, always ask for sympathy and help, and even distort history by taking advantage of their identity as a victim, for example, a typical "victim mentality" has been haunting Japan after World War II, which, as the only country that had ever gone through a nuclear attack, always stresses its identity as a victim of nuclear weapons but recoils from its responsibility for the invasive wars it had waged. Its unwise attitude towards history has sparked wide criticism and outcry from its neighbors who have been hurt by the Japanese invasions. There is a revengeful emotion brooding among the people of the victim countries, and even revengeful voices permeating the Internet. Therefore, the unhealthy "victim mentality" not only cuts sympathy and recognition from the outside, but creates new social identity crises, which will then formulate vicious circles where bad things reinforce each other, and terribly threaten regional peace and stability.

As time goes by, when the Nanjing Massacre is reviewed, it might be more natural for the younger generation who have never experienced the horrors of war to take a perspective that is close to an observer or a judge, while in fact it is not easy for people to completely abstain from the feeling like a victim. Recognized or not, the traumatic memory has long merged into our blood and national unconsciousness, and has become an inseparable part of the Chinese memory of its history. Whether for the victims or the observers of the Nanjing Massacre, it is necessary to reconstruct a shared traumatic memory, if the social identity of the victims is to be renewed.

"Social identity is in nature a collective thinking" (Li, 2007). Its process consists of group categorization, individual categorization and social comparison. The old social identity system has been broken by a traumatic memory, and to build a new one must count on the public reconstruction of the traumatic memory. In the case of the Nanjing Massacre, the traumatic memory must be built into

a memory shared by all nations and even all human beings so that it could gain the widest possible social identity.

Education on history or attitudes towards history is an effective way to construct a shared traumatic memory. In the case of the Nanjing Massacre, there are three stages.

First, personalize the victims so as to win more emotional support. Today's doubts about the Nanjing Massacre victims are largely attributed to the huge gap of time and space, and a lack of education regarding the massacre, which estranges people from the victims. When it comes to the victims, most would only think of the number of deaths, a dull image, and a rigid concept that can hardly raise empathy. Only by personalizing those victims can they gain wider concern and sympathy, for example, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which serves as a private testimony to the killings of the Jews by the Nazis, has won the Jewish victims worldwide sympathy and respect. It reveals the critical role personalization plays to bring people emotionally closer to victims. Only by making people feel the same way as the victims can the painful history be jointly borne and a traumatic memory shared by all human beings be created.

Second, the historical education on the Nanjing Massacre must shift its attention from humanity during the disaster to post-disaster humanity. Previous education always focus on how people behaved during the massacre and explores the pitiful state of the victims and the cruelty of the butchers, namely the state of the people involved during the disaster. Though education aims to understand history objectively and comprehensively, it is far from enough for the construction of a shared traumatic memory. The observer of the disaster, without a time machine, must, while never forgetting the disaster, transcend its national feelings as a victim, focus on the future, place itself in the shared human destiny, and, with the goal of peace and development in mind, consider how people should interact with each other after the disaster. That would be a crucial step for the humanity during the disaster to evolve into post-disaster humanity.

Third, decontextualize the traumatic memory of the Chinese in the Nanjing Massacre education, and extend it to something owned by all mankind. Jeffrey Charles Alexander, a US cultural sociologist, once pointed out that the construction of traumatic memory matters for social identity in that "through the construction of a cultural trauma, all social communities, countries, societies, and even the whole civilization, will not only identify the very existence and source of human woes, but also will undertake some major responsibilities. Once the cause of the sufferings is identified and due moral responsibility is assumed, unity is established among the members of the group, which is supposed to make people share others' pain." A national trauma, once decontextualized, can reach people beyond ethnic or national borders, and with the scope of the injured being enlarged, evolve into the painful destiny shared by all, thereby making itself a cultural trauma shared by all human beings, and gaining wider and deeper social identity.

In 2015, the Nanjing Massacre documents were archived in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register, marking a crucial step for the Nanjing Massacre to evolve from a national memory to a mankind memory. However, in comparison with the killings of Jews by the Nazis, the Nanjing Massacre is less known around the world. It has a long way to go before it becomes a real traumatic memory shared by the whole world. And only then can it get the widest social identity.

The call to construct a shared traumatic memory and gain wide social identity reflects deeper cognition and more in-depth understanding about the Nanjing Massacre, which rightly echoes

the trend of opposing wars and safeguarding peace around the world today. As the concept of building a community of common destiny is getting popular, to build a peaceful world that sees no wars has become a beautiful vision held by people all over the world. History is always worth learning from and all the past wars and atrocities must be seriously examined. Always remembering history and never forgetting the historical tragedies is helpful for people to draw lessons and avoid similar disasters in the future. In that sense, the construction of a shared traumatic memory of the Nanjing Massacre and gaining social identity for the victims is far more meaningful for this age and reality than it seems.

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