

Introduction

Toronto ALPHA was given the unique opportunity to display a series of photos that were graciously lent for “Forgotten Voices, Living History – International Conference for Educators on the History of WWII in Asia” by various museums in China and Korea.

For most North Americans, WWII in Asia only began after the Imperial Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941. But in fact, war had already been raging in Asia for a decade. Today, most scholars of Asian history accept that the war in Asia began on September 18, 1931 when the Imperial Japanese Army attacked and occupied Manchuria, in northern China. On July 7 1937, Japan launched an all-out invasion of China. As in many wars, the roots of conflict in the Asia-Pacific run deep. In order to understand these and subsequent events, it is our honour to present a historical framework through photographs of three main themes: “Comfort Women,” Chemical & Biological Warfare and the Nanjing Massacre.

It is our hope that the exhibition will help educate and reveal the atrocities that occurred in Asia during WWII. In trying to understand this terrible episode of Asian history, we cannot deny that the atrocities occurred or downplay their significance. Through the invaluable archival images, we will be able to come close to the ordeals of the victims; some of them become survivors even of today.

We would like to pay tribute to these survivors, whose forgotten voices are now being heard; their stories being told.

Our heartfelt appreciation to the generosity of the following photo contributors:

Chinese Comfort Women Research Centre, Shanghai, China

John Rabe & the International Safety Zone Memorial Hall, Nanjing, China

Nanjing Massacre Victims Memorial Hall, Nanjing, China

The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan, South Korea

Unit 731 Memorial Hall, Harbin, China

For more conference information, please visit www.torontoalphaconference.org or email info@torontoalpha.org for any comments and enquiries.

Conclusion

As we have seen in this exhibition, the capacity of humans to be malevolent and savage towards one another is seemingly without limit. Therefore, it is our duty as human beings to examine in detail, the history of this war and the lessons that need to be gleaned from it. We must never forget the horrendous crimes against humanity that were committed by the Japanese military machine. Unfortunately, there are still people today that are completely indifferent to the suffering that occurred, or even worse, who outright deny these historical facts. We only hope for a world peace and happiness, but in order to achieve that, human society must be based on reason and compassion. Atrocities against human rights must be acknowledged and engraved into our collective memory, a constant reminder of our duty to be vigilant lest we slip back into the throes of reckless militarism. Mankind should never have to experience again, the cruelty, pain and terror that the people represented in this exhibit had to endure. There is hope behind the silent cries of these victims. The hope that their suffering was not in vain; that, in the future, the world will choose compassion over cruelty, peace over war, and justice over inequity.



Peace & Reconciliation Study Tour to China & South Korea