

Study Questions for the film Nanking

1. Watch carefully for the way in which the film, an HBO Documentary, is constructed. Who is represented here and how?
2. The film opens and closes with footage of the city walls. How do the two sequences differ? What does each seek to convey?
3. The actors are doing what the filmmakers describe as a "staged reading." How does this differ from the cinematic acting we are used to? Why do we see them drinking coffee and being called to order by the Stage Manager? Are they wearing costumes--what kind of costumes?
4. The readings are interspersed among survivor accounts--or survivor accounts are interspersed among the readings. Who are these survivors (you need not learn names) and what do they contribute to the film?
5. On December 12, 1937, during the siege of Nanking, Japanese planes bombed and sank the US gunboat Panay, even though the two countries were not at war. It was carrying diplomats and refugees from Nanking. Japan said it had been an error, apologized and paid an indemnity but decrypted radio transmissions indicated that the Japanese pilots were following orders. Why was Rabe not on the ship?



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6. How did the Japanese Embassy in Nanking react to the proposal for a Safety Zone?
7. Who is John Rabe and what did he do? Who is Robert Wilson and what did he do? Who is Minnie Vautrin and what did she do?
8. How did Chinese soldiers get into the civilian Safety Zone?
9. The names of the Japanese soldiers interviewed are pseudonyms. What do these witnesses contribute to the film?
10. Fitch left on February 19th (when the worst was over) with Magee's film sewed into the lining of his coat. What is the significance of this film and why did Fitch smuggle it out?
11. What is the Yasukuni Shrine?

Discussion Questions

1. One of the soldiers, when talking about their raping girls and women, says that nothing good comes of rape because "both sides" must be willing and engaged. We don't know how he came to that conclusion, but what does it suggest about wartime rape?
2. The film presents many witnesses, both present and absent/represented. Pick a single account/story and relate it in your own words.
3. Please watch the credits. What is the effect of seeing the living witnesses sitting silently on chairs with studio equipment visible?