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"American Goddess of Mercy" Revisited: Horror Behind the Mundane Details in Ha Jin's *Nanjing Requiem*

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Abstract

This essay examines how Ha Jin deploys historical materials such as diary and letters as a means of structuring a transnational Nanjing Massacre narrative. Particularly, I address Ha Jin's "critical historical consciousness" in representing the Nanjing Massacre, which is first and foremost, closely related to his intellectual dilemma as a migrant writer— whether to use English to write stories about China in the U.S. Then I argue that in adapting Vautrin's diary, Jin emphasizes exhaustive, details that give us a channel to mediate the loaded term of "American Goddess of Mercy." Furthermore, through these mundane details, Jin portrays a Maussean notion of gift economy in Vautrin's management of Ginling College, as Jin directs attention towards the horror of "complicity" between Vautrin and the Japanese army. In addition, he attempts to represent the unrepresentable—the failure of such a gift economy—exemplified by cruel rapes committed by Japanese soldiers inside the camp who consider Vautrin as their "friend." I argue that Ha Jin calls attention to the pitfall of traditional historiography and demands us to re-examine the usage of historical materials in aesthetic works.

Key words: Nanjing Massacre; Ha Jin; Nanjing Requiem; Minnie Vautrin; critical historical consciousness; gift economy

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1. "AMERICAN GODDESS OF MERCY" REVISITED—HORROR BEHIND THE MUNDANE DETAILS IN HA JIN'S *NANJING REQUIEM*

1.1 Historical Background: Minnie Vautrin—The American Goddess of Mercy

Chinese American author Ha Jin has orchestrated an epic requiem for Nanjing Massacre victims in his 2011 historical novel *Nanjing Requiem*, which stages American missionary Minnie Vautrin's diary and other historical records in a most realistic way. In modern Chinese history, the Nanjing Massacre generated brutally tremendous havoc. It began after the fall of Republic of China's capital city Nanjing on December 13th, 1937. The massacre generally refers to more than forty days of mass murders committed by the invading Japanese troops on POWs and civilians. Through December 1937 to the restoration of order in February 1938, the Japanese army committed numerous horrendous acts of killing, looting and raping inside Nanjing city. In the 1945 Tokyo Trial, the official Chinese governmental estimates were a death toll of 300,000 to 400,000 and the rape of more than 20,000 Chinese women.[1]

And yet, in these six weeks of blood bath, there was also a place of hope and salvation in the hell-like Nanjing. On the eve before Japan's invasion, some westerners who remained in the city set up the Nanjing International Safety

[1] For more on the history of Nanjing Massacre, see Joshua A. Fogel, *The Nanjing Massacre in history and historiography*. (University of California Press, 2000); Kaiyuan, Zhang, and Donald MacInnis, *Eyewitnesses to Massacre: American Missionaries Bear Witness to Japanese Atrocities in Nanjing*. (Routledge, 2015). There is still an ongoing debate over the death toll: Some Japanese revisionists claim that as few as 5,000 died; others claim the entire incident was a fabrication. In this paper, I'm not going to pinpoint the exact number of death toll, which I believe only would distract people's attention to the event itself.

Zone that consisted of 25 refugee camps surrounding the American embassy. Until to its closure on May 5th, 1938, the Zone offered protection to about 250,000 Chinese refugees.[2] Minnie Vautrin was a prestigious member of the 15-person Safety Committee and the head of the all-female refugee camp of Ginling Women College. Minnie Vautrin (1886-1941), an American female missionary who was once the president of Ginling College in the city of Nanjing, has been hailed and remembered as "Goddess of Mercy" for her heroic protection of Chinese female refugees during the notorious Nanjing Massacre. Born and raised up in Illinois, Vautrin made her decision to go to China for preaching gospel in 1912 that had been heavily influenced by the heyday of The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM)[3]. After six years of work in San Ching Girl's middle school in Hefei, she then joined the newly established Ginling Women College in 1919 where she would devote her life to the higher education of Chinese Christian women until her final nervous breakdown in 1941. Her days at Ginling College has witnessed the most tumultuous years in modern Chinese history: the 1920s Anti-Religious Movement and then the 1937-1938 Nanjing Massacre.[4] During the fall of Nanjing, under the leadership of Minnie Vautrin, Ginling College transformed from an educational institution to an all-women refugee camp which sheltered up to 10000 civilian women (the initial estimated capacity was 2750). Her generosity and kindness won her the name "Goddess of Mercy" among the Chinese refugees. However, days of incessant hard work and insufficient sleep finally broke her down. Suffering from serious depression, Vautrin went back to US for medical treatment. On May 14th, 1941, she left a note and committed suicide.[5]

Almost fifty years later, Chinese American writer Iris Chang, when searching materials for her new book in Yale Library, happened to find Vautrin's diary and helped to publish it. Running from August 13th, 1937 to April 14th, 1940, in a concise and sincere tone,Vautrin's diary recounted in details of Ginling College's daily activities as refugee camp. In the last two decades, Vautrin's diary acts as a magic text which has generated a series of artistic works, including Ha Jin's English novel *Nanjing Requiem*.[6]

The novel is set in the reign of terror during and after the Nanjing Massacre. Its protagonist is the historical figure Minnie Vautrin who helped to organize the Nanjing International Safety Zone and took charge of Ginling College's refugee camp. The novel is narrated through the perspective of Vautrin's Chinese assistant—a fictional character Anling Gao who possesses a humanizing spirit that blend patriotism with struggles over moral judgment. There is a subplot of Anling's family tragedy—her son Haowen marries a Japanese woman, is forced to work for Japanese and is eventually shot dead by Chinese patriots. There is also a subplot of a Chinese refugee girl named Yulan who is snatched by Japanese, loses her mind, and later returns to cause lots of chaos on Ginling campus. Near the ending, readers learn from letters that Vautrin is suffering from nervous breakdown; she goes back to US and commits suicide. In the ending, Anling goes to testify in Tokyo Trial and meets with her Japanese daughter-in-law and her grandson.

One of its striking aspects of the novel is the characterization of the real historical figure Minnie Vautrin as the protagonist. In an interview, Jin maintains that in some sense *Nanjing Requiem* is an American story that he intends for American readers. Jin mentions that whereas John Rabe[7], left Nanjing soon after the Massacre, the American missionaries like Minnie Vautrin stuck to their positions for a much longer period. Even after these missionaries came back to US, they underwent special investigation by the government about their relationship to Communist China. What's more, Minnie Vautrin, a faithful Christian, committed suicide under mental pressure, which was clearly a forbidden behaviour at that time. In America, only a few people publicized these American missionaries' heroic deeds, meanwhile in China,

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2 Suping Lu has offered a detailed description of the Safety Zone and related documents. See Lu, *They Were in Nanjing*, 20-43.

3 For more on the history of American missionaries in China, see John K. Fairbank, *The missionary enterprise in China and America*. (Cambridge University Press, 1974); Suzanne Barnett, *Christianity in China: Early Protestant Missionary Writings*. (Cambridge University, 1985); Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*. (Blackwell, 2011).

4 For more on Ginling Women College, see Jin Feng, *The Making of a Family Saga: Ginling College*. (SUNY Press, 2010).

5 For more on Vautrin's biography, see Hu, Hualing. *American goddess at the rape of Nanking: The courage of Minnie Vautrin*. (SIU Press, 2000). Based on my research, here I offer a sketchy list of books and films influenced by Vautrin's diary in a chronological order: Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking: the Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (1997), Shouhua Qi's *Purple Moutain: A story of the Rape of Nanking* (2005), Douglas Galbraith's *A Winter in China* (2006), documentary film *Nanking* (2007), Sino-German film *John Rabe* (2009), Lu Chuan's film *City of Life and Death* (2009), Majorie Chan's drama *A Nanking Winter*, Ha Jin's *Nanjing Requiem* (2011), Marina Rundell's *Minnie Vautrin* (2011), Geling Yan's *The Flowers of War* (2012), Wing Tek Lum's *The Nanjing Massacre: Poems* (2013), to name just a few.

6 Based on my research, here I offer a sketchy list of books and films influenced by Vautrin's diary in a chronological order: Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking: the Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (1997), Shouhua Qi's *Purple Moutain: A story of the Rape of Nanking* (2005), Douglas Galbraith's *A Winter in China* (2006), documentary film *Nanking* (2007), Sino-German film *John Rabe* (2009), Lu Chuan's film *City of Life and Death* (2009), Majorie Chan's drama *A Nanking Winter*, Ha Jin's *Nanjing Requiem* (2011), Marina Rundell's *Minnie Vautrin* (2011), Geling Yan's *The Flowers of War* (2012), Wing Tek Lum's *The Nanjing Massacre: Poems* (2013), to name just a few.

7 John Rabe (1882-1990), was a German businessman and a Nazi member who once worked for Siemens AG in Nanjing. Rabe had been elected as the chairman of the Safety Zone committee and opened his own house to Chinese refugees. Like Minnie Vautrin, Rabe also kept a diary during the Nanjing Massacre. In 1938, Rabe returned to Germany and he had been trialed as a Nazi Party member after the war. See, John Rabe, *The Goodman of Nanking: the Diaries of John Rabe* (Vintage, 2007).

people tend to be sceptical about these Americans partly due to political propaganda (My translation)[8]. In my view, Ha Jin, the controversial Chinese migrant writer, who has faced the consequences of deliberate estrangement from and even abandonment of his native land, finds solace in re-telling Vautrin's life stories.

Ha Jin (born in 1956) is a celebrated and award-winning contemporary Chinese American novelist and poet. He was born in Liaoning Province, China and joined the People's liberation Army in 1969, working on the border between China and Soviet Union. In 1975 he left the army and two years later he took the national college entrance exam and entered into Heilongjiang University. In 1985, Jin enrolled into the Ph.D. program in English Literature at Brandeis University and after the Tiananmen Square Incident, Jin began to write and publish in English. Ha Jin's works earned a long list of prestigious literary awards: his short-story collections *Under the Red Flag* won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction in 1997, and another collection *Ocean of Words* (1996) was awarded the PEN/Hemingway Award; his novel *Waiting*, which won the 1999 National Book Award and the 2000 Pen/Faulkner, is based on his personal experiences back in PLA; his novel *War Trash*, which depicts Korean War, won the Pen/Faulkner award again in 2005 and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. The Chinese translation of *Nanjing Requiem* 南京安魂曲 has been named as the top one in *Asia Weekly*'s list of "2011 Annual Chinese Language Novels". Viewing these literary prizes, it's no exaggeration to say that Ha Jin is one of the most accomplished and respected Asian American writers, acclaimed by critics and readers throughout the Western World.

In stark contrast, the Chinese government banned most of Ha Jin's works that portray China. One reason behind the harsh censorship may lay in his "brazen" touch of "highly sensitive topics" such as the Tiananmen Square Incident, Tibet, the Korean War and the Cultural Revolution. The most poignant criticism towards Ha Jin comes from a famous Peking University professor Liu Yiqing's Chinese essay "Trading Honesty for Deal" (Na chengshi zuo wenzhang), which was written after she attended Ha Jin's reading of *Waiting* in Chicago in 1999. In this article, Liu states that Ha Jin has paid a high price for his National Book Award. She contends that Jin became a tool for demonizing China in the US popular media. Regarding why US media values Ha Jin's novel, Liu argues that the US is more interested in the ignorant and backward Chinese people portrayed in his novel rather than Jin's literary merits and talent.[9]

Furthermore, some Chinese critics accuse Ha Jin of betraying China by using English instead of his mother tongue of Chinese. Many Chinese people wonder who appointed Ha Jin a spokesperson for the Chinese; after all he writes in English and was not allowed to come back to China after 1989. His book *The Writer as a Migrant* is a literary manifesto in which he distances himself away from any political implications of writing about China in English:

> What was needed was one artist who could stay above immediate social needs and create a genuine piece of literature that preserved the oppressed in memory. Yes, to preserve is the key function of literature, which, to combat historical amnesia, must be predicted on the autonomy and integrity of literary works inviolable by time. (30)

In his manifesto, Ha Jin declares his goal of writing in order to narrate China's past outside of Mainland and unrestricted by China's harsh censorship system. Ha Jin seems to face a universal phenomenon for Chinese migrant writers whose intention of writing about China raises new challenges beyond state censorship. Ha Jin hasn't returned to China after 1989 and this makes it extremely difficult for him to get a real sense of China's present. In re-imagining China's historical past, he is limited to an outsider's perception of what live in China has become since 1989. This had lead some readers in China to accuse him of commodifying national trauma and of trading on it to achieve personal glory. Meanwhile, within the American literary circle, it is usually his "weird" application of English that attracts attention rather than his accounts of historical events.

Not all reviews in the U.S. have been favourable. After the publishing of his novel *A Free Life* (2007), the author John Updike wrote an unfavourable book review for the New Yorker titled *Nan, American Man*. *A Free Life* tells the story of how the Wu family including Wu Nan, his wife Ping ping and his son Tao tao attempt to integrate into American society as new immigrants from China. In general, Updike considered *A Free Life* to be a relatively lumpy and uncomfortable work; "the novel rarely gathers the kind of momentum that lets us overlook its language" (100). Though he acknowledged that Ha Jin's command of English has no precedents except for Nabokov and Conrad, Updike's review focuses on Jin's misuse of language instead on the story itself and states that Jin's writings sound as though they were directly translated from the Mandarin.[10] In a review to Jin's short story collection *The Bridegroom*, Claire Messud expresses a similar idea that Jin's works "read as if he had written them in Chinese and merely undertaken the translations

[8] See "Ha Jin: wenxue de kuxingseng" (哈金：文学的苦行僧，Ha Jin: the Sadhu of Literature), *Nangfang People*, November 25, 2011.

[9] In this article, Liu comes up with the example of *Chicago Tribune*'s news coverage of *Waiting* on which there is an image of a pair of Chinese woman's small feet and a man's Qing-dynasty long braid (the image is very odd that the story that set in 1960s has nothing to do with Qing braid), my translation.

[10] Updike's review pinpoints some 'awkward phrases' such as: a character "licking his compressed teeth," a tennis court "studded with yellow balls," "a giant disk [the sun] flaming a good part of the eastern sky," "the lobby was swarmed with people," a victim of violence "booted half to death". See Updike, John. "Nan, American Man." *The New Yorker*, December 3 (2007): 100. Print.

himself."[11] Ironically, many Chinese readers complain that the Chinese translations of Jin's works totally lose the "verve" of Jin's original English writings.

Some critics view Jin's writing as flat and sometimes awkward, which is "emotionally removed, seemingly alienated from the core of human feeling" (Updike100). Jin once defend himself against such criticism in his article "In Defence of Foreignness": "Indeed, the frontiers of English verge on foreign territories, and therefore we cannot help but sound foreign to native ears, but the frontiers are the only proper places where we can claim our existence and make our contributions to this language" (469). In this essay, Jin states that what critics deem his "misuses of English" are actually an enrichment of Standard English and an expansion of the capacity of English. King-Kok Cheung interprets Jin's rebuttal in considering solecisms as "deliberate coinage designed to render those Chinese expressions having no ready Anglophone equivalents" (5). In a similar vein, Haomin Gong states that Ha Jin's play with languages not only "creates a defamiliarizing effect and a sense of humor for his readers, but also reveals the absurdity of imprisonment of a language" (147). Such writings shed light upon our understanding of how literature crosses borders of all kinds. Gong points out that Jin's seemingly idiosyncratic use of English is not merely a literary trick to attract attention, but a potential challenge to the boundaries conveyed in concepts such as diaspora, exile, cultural identity etc.

Jin's self-defensive remarks and Gong's argument remind me of Deleuze and Guattari's "minor literature' in their book on *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Deleuze and Guattari consider that minor literature transforms the major language in such ways as to facilitate resistance to dominant meanings and values. This not simply a challenge to the dominant signifier or signified, but rather a proposal of "two possible treatments of the same language," that detterritorializes the language. I consider Ha Jin's writing practices in English as similarly transformative. Jin's style pushes the American English language to new level of intensity and affect that create the potential for new meaning in result.

In conclusion, there will always be heated debate over Ha Jin's works in both US and China. It seems that there is no escape from a Ha Jin dilemma for Ha Jin or for other non-native migrant writers from various backgrounds. Jin always trod on the between-land where his literary imagination easily soars across the Pacific but belongs to neither the Chinese nor American mainstream literary tradition. Jing Tsu said these Sinophone writers have "moved from a primary identification with mainland China to a secondary vying with one another over the articulation of a China in difference" (*Sound and Script* 105). I view Jin's stance as a favourable one that could project new perspectives on modern China's painful past as it is closely connected with diasporic experiences. Ha Jin's writing about China rests upon a forgotten past that he accesses from his unique transnational historical consciousness. The "shortcoming" of never being able to come back endows Ha Jin with opportunities to delve into historical records and engage with transnational memories. Such a between-land turns into vibrant site of reimagining history as it spans the Pacific.

2. HA JIN'S CRITICAL HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

2.1 Restaging Diaries and Letters in Nanjing Requiem

Ha Jin attaches a long list of reference books at the end of *Nanjing Requiem*, including letters and diaries written by witnesses, which constitute an important source for his references of Nanjing Massacre history. In the novel, Ha Jin weaves different genres of writings, noticeably letters and diaries into his narratives. I interpret Ha Jin's strategy of invoking these writing genres as not merely a way to frame his plot, but also his attempt to take a reflexive stance on the very application of different literary genres in writing historical novels.

We could see Ha Jin's critical historical consciousness bears on transnational merit when he deals with historical materials in literary representations. In discussing modern China's narratives filled with traumatic memories, Ban Wang comes up with the notion of a "critical historical consciousness," "which, caught in modern acceleration, is also capable of self-critique from the vantage point of its 'other' and past: the milieu of memory" (5). In other words, Wang considers memory as a countercritique to linear, teleological historical narratives that are "forward-looking and change-driven"; hence he argues that memory can direct attention to the forgotten and silenced historical moments.

In my view, *Nanjing Requiem* embodies Ha Jin's historical consciousness in battling against the national amnesia through a self-critical method of readapting historical writings into a historical novel. Obviously, the historical materials that Ha Jin uses in writing this novel most centers on personal diaries of both foreign missionaries and ordinary Chinese people. Instead of blindly following these historical narratives, Jin takes a critical view towards these writings as he strives to build up plots and characters that are absent from historiography. The most important historical text for reference in this novel is Minnie Vautrin's Nanjing Massacre diary.

In the novel, the protagonist Minnie Vautrin and the narrator Anling Gao both keep diaries, parallel with the historical figures: Minnie Vautrin and Tsen Shui-fang[12]—

[11] See Messud, Claire. "Tiger-Fighter Meets Cowboy Chicken." *New York Times* on the Web 22 (2000). Print.

[12] See Tsen's published English diary in Hu, Hua-ling, and Zhang Lian-hong, eds. *The undaunted women of Nanking: The wartime diaries of Minnie Vautrin and Tsen Shui-fang* (SIU Press, 2010).

the nurse of Ginling College. Vautrin's and Tsen's diaries complement each other in providing historical facts and background for Nanjing Requiem. Compared to Vautrin's calm and detailed way of documenting incidents in her diary, Tsen's diary in Chinese is very emotional and concise, lacking detailed descriptions. However, in the novel, borrowing from Anling Gao's comment, Jin suggests that because Vautrin's diary is "official" it might conceal something and mask personal feelings. Hence in the novel, it's Anling's diary and Anling's writing of her diary that takes the center stage.

However, as a historical novel, *Nanjing Requiem* is not a direct copy of Vautrin's and Tsen's two diaries, but extends them in order to mediate on the power and the limit of using diaries and letters in telling historical narratives. There is another subplot of a mad girl named Yulan, who seems a typical female victim of the Massacre. Unlike Vautrin and Anling, Yulan is illiterate and cannot write down her own stories; hence Anling's writings are the only preservation of Yulan's stories. I read Yulan as symbolizing the historical void in traditional historiography that erases sufferings of those who did not write. In some sense, the memories of these victims who died with no witnesses can only be retrieved in a poetic space, the terms of which I discuss in the final section.

Most criticism centers on Ha Jin's over-realistic presentation of historical facts, especially through the characterization of Minnie Vautrin, which becomes a vehicle for his polemical views. *Nanjing Requiem* (南京安魂曲) is Ha Jin's first book to be published in mainland China in 2011 by Jiangsu Literature and Art Publishing House. *Southern Metropolis Weekly*, a major Chinese newspaper, terms Ha Jin's Chinese version of Nanjing Requiem as one of the "Ten Most Disappointing Books of 2011" with a poignant review. This article centers upon his "ambition to write Chinese national trauma", and asks critically "Ha Jin sings the requiem for whom?" Apart from pointing out Jin's weak plot and structures, most of this review questions Jin's approach of history—standing from the position of westerners in telling a Chinese national trauma. The reviewer writes: "It's better to say that Ha Jin actually tries to soothe the souls of those brave foreign missionaries rather than of tens of thousands of the dead Nanjing Chinese people" (my translation)[13]. Certainly, this book review differentiates itself from other more positive book reviews published by some mainstream Chinese newspapers.[14]

Generally speaking, most unfavorable Chinese reviews complain that Ha Jin tells of an "Americanized" Nanjing Massacre story, meanwhile most of the reviews written by American literary critics blame Ha Jin for failing to develop the character of Minnie Vautrin. Maria Arana from *The Washington Post* said, "Vautrin is as wooden and lifeless as a marionette." David Evans from *Financial Times* posits that this novel is "a disappointment" lacking Ha Jin's typical style of nuanced characterization and that although "Minnie should provide the book's dramatic center," "she is little more than a cipher for a vague notion of Christian beneficence" ("Nanjing Requiem review"). As these reviews note Jin's documentary-method of retelling historical details sacrificed character depth for monotonous historical facts. Mark Athitakis contends that Jin's detailed description of historical facts has compromised the melodramatic effects: "such details may be factually correct, but they strip the novel's narrative drive and give the story a third-hand feel."

Is it true that Ha Jin relied too much on historical facts that he had sacrificed the artistic creation? In the next few sections, I'll further elaborate on Jin's critical historical consciousness, in terms of his treatment of historical materials of diaries and letters. I argue that his documentary-like writings not only gives readers a sense of historical reality but also readdress the erasure of the past by attempting to represent the "unrepresentable." It is through these mundane details adapted from history writings that Jin manages to convey the horror of the Nanjing Massacre, as Jin selects Minnie Vautrin as the agent for piercing into the massacre.

2.2 How American "Goddess of Mercy" was Tempered

On my first visit to Ginling Women College (now part of Nanjing Normal University) in August 2015, I failed to find memorial sites relevant to Minnie Vautrin. After much walking, I gave up and headed across the "Nanjing International Safety Zone" along Ninghai Road, crossed to Nanjing University and stopped beside John Rabe's old residence where my eyes caught the only three remaining Chinese words on the decayed wall includes the Chinese characters "Wei Da De" (the great). Several decades have passed and the whole Safety Zone has turned into a bustling business area now, hence my walking failed to invoke any empathy, neither could I picture Vautrin leads groups of refugees walking from Ginling College to Nanjing University.

A bizarre feeling struck me that I could only get the "real" sense of space and place in Ha Jin's novel. Geographer Yi-fu Tuan states that a sense of place "implies a certain distance between self and place that allows the self to appreciate a place" (4).[15] Tuan understands such a

[13] "Ha Jin ba Nanjing datusha xiecheng meiguo de gushi" (哈金把南京大屠杀写成美国人的故事, Ha Jin has written an Americanized story of Nanjing Massacre), *Dongfang Daily*, October 11th, 2011, my translation.

[14] Almost every book review of Chinese media praises Jin's *Nanjing Requiem*. *Southern Weekly*哈金：“就是把事情讲清楚”——《南京安魂曲》的逻辑*Beijing News* even uses the title "Dedicate Greatness to Nanjing Requiem"把伟大献给南京安魂曲.

[15] According to Yi-fu Tuan, place is a "center of meaning constructed by experience," if we consider place is pause, he said then "each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into space", see more relevant discussion in Tuan's book, *Space and Place*.

sense could only occur after the old landscape underwent a complete change or the person is displaced. Ha Jin, who hasn't returned to China since 1989, doesn't have the chance to explore the remaining sites that commemorate the Massacre, however, probably only Jin's novel manages to re-visualize the historical context of Ginling College's place/space to convey cultural meanings that are Chinese and international as well.

Ha Jin provides a literal map that becomes the background of the fiction before the first chapter in *Nanjing Requiem*. It is a detailed map of Ginling Women's College in 1937 and enables readers to orient themselves by imagining the spatial contours of the setting. As readers move through the books, they can flip back to pinpoint a location. The famous Chinese writer Yu Hua, author of *To Live* wrote the preface for the translated Chinese edition, notes that Ha Jin's narrator is very calm and conveys a consistent dull pain and that the plot presents the story as if it were a documentary movie (my translation). Yu Hua's comment exactly mirrors why the readers expecting melodrama have been overwhelmed by the documentary-like presentation of details in the novel, but Yu fails to notice the aesthetic effect of frustrating melodrama lies in detailed descriptions of place/space. It is also one of the most distinctive features of Jin's novels. For instance, Ha Jin's 2007 short story collection *A Good Fall*, also delves into the normal mundane living experiences, this time of a Chinese American immigrant in New York City. The stories frequently mention real life locations such as buildings, streets, blocks and so forth. Reading these stories is like touring Chinatown in NYC's Flushing district guided by the author instead of visiting hallowed ground of national trauma. This is Jin's strategy.

In *Nanjing Requiem*, Ha Jin continues this writing style to invoke historical sites from decades past. He takes us through the arena of Nanjing International Safety Zone, and Ginling College's refugee camp. These descriptions map out a contested, tension-filled place where race, gender, class and national identity, are in a state of chaos brought on by war. Giorgio Agamben describes the "state of exception"[16] as being reflected in the powers that organize life when the state is in disarray. Here, I would like to extend Agamben's notion to discuss about a different form of sovereignty control enacted by missionaries. During the Nanjing Massacre, Japan and China vied for control of Nanjing as the US missionaries carried out their own state of emergency. The missionaries strived to claim God's sovereignty in the International Safety Zone—a place of neutrality. Here, Ha Jin also touches upon the irony of "Goddess of Mercy," showing that Vautrin needed state power as well as Japanese military power to set up the refugee camp. In the novel, Ha Jin elaborates on how she tries to vie for power to organize life in the state of exception.

In other words, the camp estranges the characters and then the texts themselves from the stereotyped representations of identity and nationhood. Most importantly, Ha Jin's map helps to visualize Vautrin's diary details and build a sense of theatricality, as each scene reads like a spectacle. It unfolds on terrain that was contested during the war and that became a site of Chinese state memorialization afterwards. Hence through the prefatory map, Ha Jin dedicates the whole book to meticulous descriptions of the preparation and management of Ginling College's daily routines mainly handled by Vautrin and Anling in almost exact historical accuracy. In the novel, Jin suggests that the refugee camp of Ginling College is a community organized around Minnie Vautrin through a complex network of social relations in a state of potential anarchy. Jin's characterization of Vautrin directs the reader's attention to this network rather than to her role as an individual hero.

In a way, the camp resembled a Maussean ritual economy where social, political, and legal relations are mediated and negotiated via the exchange of gifts—gifts that are "apparently free and disinterested but nevertheless constrained and self-interested" (Mauss 4). By invoking this concept, I interpret Ha Jin's construction of Minnie Vautrin's role in refugee camp more like a "gift-giver" rather than the American "Goddess of Mercy" to give sense of historical verisimilitude to historical novels. Though such descriptions might seem to be quite boring and monotonous as the critics have pointed out, we need to note that Vautrin's 800 pages long diary is full of such trivia—details of names of refugees, food, figure, number, price etc. Therefore, in refuting the unfavorable views of Vautrin's construction as lifeless marionette, I argue that Ha Jin's realistic style helps us to understand why and how Minnie Vautrin could be revered by Chinese refugees around her as "Goddess of Mercy," in ways that are not about her status a foreign savior. Jin embeds Vautrin in the economy of the safety zone so that her status of a Goddess is not about transcending historical conditions.

In 1925, Marcel Mauss published his masterpiece *The Gift*, which is a founding work of social theories of reciprocity and gift exchange. Based on a wide range of empirical studies in some societies deemed primitive, Mauss discusses the obligations embedded in gift exchanges: the obligation to give gifts, the obligation to receive them and the obligation to return the gift. Mauss points out two mechanisms at work in such gift economies: one was that the donor of gifts pursues prestige and rank through gift-giving rather than capital accumulation and leaders form powerful social networks to connect clients through ties of reciprocal obligation; the other is that such ongoing practices of gift-giving have indirect consequences such as avoiding war, promoting

[16] See Agamben, Giorgio. *State of exception*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

for stability, and generating solidarity and peaceful coexistence.[17]

I argue that, in *Nanjing Requiem,* Ha Jin presents the Ginling College refugee camp as a miniature of Mauss's gift economy created in a state emergency. This is why Ha Jin presents meticulously detailed descriptions of gift exchanges ranging from the daily meals to the price of chicken on black market, with Minnie Vautrin as the most hospitable hostess for different groups of people. Vautrin's daily task is to ensure the safety in Jinling College, which basically requires the peaceful coexistence of the foreigners, the Chinese refugees and the Japanese army. A network of unstable social relations is mediated into a state of equilibrium gift exchanges. The gift here not only refers to the traditional definition of a voluntarily commodity given to other people, but incurs a broader Maussean sense of the sustained and incessant reciprocity necessary to maintaining peace and order in camp for all residents.

In the trade activity that wins recognition from the occupying force, members of the Ginling College staff, headed by Minnie Vautrin, are the biggest donor of gifts: they offer protection for Chinese refugees by giving free food and security; they throw parties and dinners to entertain fellow foreigners in town; they also offer gratuities such as free food and visiting opportunities for the Japanese. In reciprocity, the Chinese refugees learn to respect the campus leaders and follow rules; the foreigners help Minnie Vautrin's management from time to time, and the Japanese partially acknowledge the neutrality of the refugee camp's status and agree not to interfere with its operation.

Jin invokes details of preparing for banquet to fully display the complexity of such a gift economy. For instance, in a scene where Vautrin needs the help of Dr. Chu to gather more useful information about the mad woman Yulan's whereabouts, Minnie asks Anling to use 30 yuan to throw a dinner for Dr. Chu (a Chinese doctor works for Japanese army) and some other foreign teachers. This dinner turns out to be a small feast with "roast chicken, a large fried bass, smoked duck, and braised pork cubes". Anling's husband Yaoping takes out his only bottle of Five Grain Sap (a classy Chinese brand of liquor)—although it is actually a counterfeit bottle acquired for four yuan on the black market. The point here is that the symbolic benefits of mutual respect grow out of the social practice of exchange rather than the innate quality of the material exchanged. In staging this dinner during an ongoing state of emergency, Jin includes an assortment of guests from different national, race and class backgrounds: there are foreigners like Vautrin and Lewis Smythe who have more sympathy towards China, aloof foreigners who still retain good feelings towards the Japanese, patriotic Chinese staff like Anling and her husband Yaoping as well as Chinese traitors who work for the Japanese army.

In the novel, Ha Jin applies many concrete statistics and calculations to indicate the harsh realities of hunger and the difficulties of maintaining the ecology of gift economy on campus.[18] It's important to note that all these descriptions are clearly based on historical facts that we encounter a lot of times in Vautrin's diary in which she complains about the food problem of soup kitchen. For example, the staff of Ginling College first organize their own soup kitchen to handle with the hunger problem, "steamed rice was five cents a bowl and shaobing, wheaten cakes no longer dotted with sesame seeds, were also five cents apiece; no one was allowed to buy more than two of each" (*Nanjing Requiem* 65). The food scarcity at Ginling College becomes serious when Japanese soldiers rush into camp and seize lots of food rations and sell back to the porridge plant "at a discount"— "wheat flour was two yuan for a fifty-pound bag and rice five yuan for a two-hundred-pound sack" (*Nanjing Requiem* 101). In the course of maintaining the camp, the refugees constantly complain that the soup is too watery, and Minnie worries about the theft at the porridge plant. At one point the staff discovers that the chef who had been stabbed by robbers is secretly selling food on black market. Thereafter, the camp received some wheat and barley, so the rice porridge, mixed with beans and the other grains, is finally thick enough for a pair of chopsticks to stand in a bowl of it, which was the conventional standard of quality porridge (*Nanjing Requiem* 224). In my view, the ubiquitous images of food scarcity, apart from resembling details of Vautrin's diary, offer a channel to display the mundane yet dangerous daily tasks of maintaining the terms of exchange that enable communal survival.

In gift economy, the receiver of gifts must always return more than they received: "The return is always bigger and costly." Such escalating degrees of reciprocity account for the honorific terms for those foreign missionaries who organized the safety zone. There are two scenes where the Chinese refugees hail John Rabe as "Living Buddha" and Minnie Vautrin as "Goddess of Mercy" respectively. In the first scene, thousands of wailing Chinese women are kneeling on the ground begging Rabe not to leave Nanjing and the speechless Rabe has nothing to say except to bow three times in

[17] Mauss's gift theory: in archaic societies, the concepts of gifts and exchanges, freedom and obligation, and generosity and utility, as well as persons and things and economics and politics, are mixed up together. Mauss rewrites the gift's return as an innovative act of creation, explicitly looking forward to and calling for a new morality which would be a mixture of self-sacrifice and self-interest. See more in Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*.

[18] For more discussion, see Shan, Te-Hsing. "Sublimating History into Literature: Reading Ha Jin's Nanjing Requiem." *Amerasia* Journal 38.2 (2012): 25-34.

Chinese fashion towards the crowd. In the second scene of final close of the refugee camp, the remaining female refugees perform three knocks of kowtow to show their respect to American Goddess of Mercy. Kowtow is a traditional Chinese religious practice to show utmost respect and belief in someone's superpower. "Goddess of Mercy" perceived by Chinese folk religion as immortal, is the protector of all people with her kindness and superpower. However, in the novel, it's this glorified title of "Goddess of Mercy" that constantly put the living individual Vautrin in trouble: other missionaries view her title as a cult and Vautrin herself feels too much pressure under such a title.

2.3 How "Goddess of Mercy" was Destroyed

If we summarize the first half of the novel plot as telling a story of how the American "Goddess of Mercy" was created in the process of escalating gift exchange, then the last half of this novel centers on how the American individual behind the title "Goddess of Mercy" was "destroyed" by this exchange. Merely relying on official diary with calmness and reserve is not enough to capture Vautrin's psychological depth and complicity. Therefore, Ha Jin turns to "unrepresentable" incidents that Vautrin only briefly mentioned in her diary, but that clearly haunted her until her suicide. Jin's writing arises from the aporia and gaps in historical materials—he develops a plot that recognizes the brutalities of the state of emergency by reading between the lines of Vautrin's diary and narrates a threshold of her individual life in relation to the principles implied by the "Goddess of Mercy."

In *Nanjing Requiem*, we find little direct description of mass murder, however, this does not mean that Jin's novel is free from stories of violence, on the contrary, *Nanjing Requiem* perhaps is one of the most provocative and "bloody" among the Nanjing Massacre novels. In examining the two signifiers—the blood rice and a large piece of meat, I hope to highlight Jin's politics of representing war violence through the somatic aesthetic. Key to my reading is the stigmatized female body as a reproductive entity whose decisions and actions sexually reflect their gendered subjectivities. In addition, the rape cases represented in the novel unveil the horror of complicity on the Ginling College camp, casting shadows on the glory of American "Goddess of Mercy."

In *Nanjing Requiem*, the prevalent images of hunger and sexual violence also allude to the gift economy's complicated network of social relations that play out in the secluded small space of the refugee camp. In the novel, we could also discover that the appetite for food sometimes is also accompanied with sexual violence. The voracious Japanese eaters transform into rapacious "eaters" hungry for "female flesh" and the scarred female bodies evidence eating disorders as they hunger for revenge against the perpetrators. Managing the safety zone requires regulating these violent appetites for food and sex. Her everyday task is to strategize ways to "feed" refugees and Japanese soldiers and they govern their appetites into equilibrium that enables survival. Ha Jin shows that these exhaustive details of food and sex reflect wartime appetites that gradually exhaust or more precisely speaking "consume" victims in body and in spirit.

At the beginning, through the Chinese boy Ban's account of his terrible experience of being kept a captive by the Japanese soldiers, Jin offers a glimpse of the apocalyptic scene of massacre through bizarre and provocative images of "dead fish" and "blood rice." In Ban's story, the Japanese throw a grenade into the pond and knock out the bass and carp, then the Japanese ask the Chinese captives to get into the water to bring out the half-dead fish. Then "the Japanese smashed their (the fish) heads with rifle butts, strung them through the gills with hemp ropes, and tied them to shoulder poles. They were large fish, each weighing at least fifteen pounds" (*Nanjing Requiem*14). The brutal killing process of these large fish with war weapons, characterizes these Japanese soldiers as voracious eaters. The Japanese's lust for fish has been satisfied, but their killing of Chinese captives is portrayed as purely "extravagant" fun. It is well known that the most notorious aspect of the Nanjing Massacre is Japan's breach of 1929 Geneva Convention. Readers fail to find descriptions of this mass execution of POWs in *Nanjing Requiem*, but confront appalling portrayals of Japanese soldiers randomly killing Chinese captives for sport. A Japanese officer kills a Chinese captive in a similar way as if killing a fish, "raising his sword, he gave a loud cry, charge at the tallest one among us, and slashed off his head. Two squirts of blood shot into the air more than three feet high and the man fell over without a whimper" (21). Near the end of his story, Ban said that the rice that the Japanese eat is reddish because they have used blood water to cook it, "once a Japanese mess man gave us some bowls of rice, and after I ate it, I had the taste of blood in my mouth for hours" (18).[19]

The "reddish rice" is the essence of the novel's Part One "The Fall of the Capital," which conveys the utmost cruelties of Japanese brutal killing, raping and looting that even the food and water are polluted by human blood. The reddish rice also reminds us of Lu Xun's famous short story *Medicine*, in which the old father feeds his tubercular son with Xue mantou (a bread roll dipped in the blood of executed Chinese revolutionary)[20]. Chow points out that the tradition of writing about eating, conventionally said to begin with Lu Xun, metaphorizes terror; "it is food consumption and the neuroses surrounding food

[19] Yet the most "disturbing" description of food in the novel perhaps is that the carps in the pond near Jinling College are getting fat and the grass will grow thick, because dead human bodies floats in the pond.

[20] See Xun Lu, *Selected Stories of Lu Hsun* (WW Norton & Company, 2003).

consumption that have retained a tenacious hold on writers' and readers' imagination" (81).

2.4 Representing the "Unrepresentable"

The chilling gist of Jin's provocative description of food lies in the materialization of sexually molested female bodies in a brutal kind of "consumption." Rape is among the cruelties that Japanese army imposed upon Chinese civilian women. Minnie Vautrin and other committee members did their best to deter predatory Japanese soldiers, but the imperial Japanese army still conducted many rapes inside or near the college. In depicting the sexual trauma inflicted upon Chinese women, Ha Jin shuns away from the much-discussed issue of comfort women or the bloody stories of arbitrary raping and killing of women on the city's street, focusing instead on the rape cases and sexual molestation inside Ginling College.

For Mauss, self-sacrifice is the paradoxical conclusion of those vying for power and there is no limit of gift giving. Such is the case with Minnie Vautrin whose life was consumed by her sacrifice in maintaining the regular working of this system to a degree that she became known as the "Goddess of Mercy." What's more, under the specific circumstances of Nanjing occupation, the equilibrium of this system was very fragile and once it was broken, all kinds of entangled contradictions emerge and tragedies surface.

In *Nanjing Requiem*, Ha Jin depicts some very bold and vivid rape scenes that happen inside Ginling College during the Nanjing Massacre:

> There on the floor a soldier was wiggling and moaning atop a girl… "Get off her!" Minnie rushed up and pulled the man by the collar of his jacket. He was stunned and slowly picked himself up…He forgot to pull up his pants; his member was swinging and dripping semen. The girl, eyes shut, began groaning in pain, a blood vessel on her neck pulsating…Before reaching the door, he whirled back and stretched out his hand to Minnie, grinning while mumbling, "Arigato, arigato." She looked puzzled while I wondered why he thanked her. she glared at him with flaming eyes, but he showed no remorse, as if raping a girl was just a small faux pas. (*Nanjing Requiem* 75)

(We) saw a young woman lying naked on a piece of green tarp, crying and twisting, while a soldier with a full beard was thrusting his hand between her legs and making happy noises. A bayonet stood beside her head. We rushed over and were aghast to find the man's entire hand buried in the woman's vagina, beneath which was a puddle of blood and urine…the woman, moaning in agony, closed her eyes and turned her head to the wall… her body reminded me of a large piece of meat ready for cutting, except for the spasms that jolted her every two or three seconds…(The Japanese officer) then turned to the perpetrator and slapped him across the face while yelling something. "Why did you let him go?" Minnie asked the officers. The interpreter, also an officer, told her, "Our commander scolded him. You saw, he also punished him." "But no more punishment?" she said. "There'll be more disciplinary action, of course. We know him. Not many men wear a beard like that. He's nicknamed Obstetrician." (78).

The most appalling portrayal of rape described above lies in the Japanese perpetrator's nonchalance and gratitude towards Minnie Vautrin, as the first one whirled back and stretched out his hand to Minnie, expressing thanks to her. The second perpetrator's nickname "obstetrician" further aggravates the terror of Japanese army's sexual crimes. The novel not only presents these ghastly rapes in the safety zone, but situations Minnie Vautrin in relation to them as a witness who must maintain her composure and interact with the perpetrators in order to continue the gifts exchanges that sustain the safety zone that has been itself violated. Vautrin's reactions suggest the terrible brutality of the state of emergency in which the premise of the refugee camp required complicity with the Japanese soldiers and several other parties. The first perpetrator, obviously satisfied that the camp is full of female refugees, tries to shake hands with Minnie Vautrin as if to indicate that the system is working to his benefit: the handshake acknowledges his prerogative to rape women in the safety zone, which sits in relation to the rest of unprotected Nanjing where women are vulnerable to any Japanese soldier.

The attempt to portray sexual violence in art and literature can easily fall into traps of sensationalism. Michel Bal even argues that rape resists representation because it cannot be visualized, a civilized culture would not tolerate the bold representation of rape, and generic representation of rape render victims invisible as a stereotype. Rape has this effect because the perpetrator "covers" the victim literally and figuratively, attacking her self-image and her subjectivity, which is temporarily narcotized, definitively changed and even destroyed (100). What's more, Bal notes that the experience of rape is physical and psychological in that "rape takes place inside. In this sense, rape is by definition imagined; it can only exist in experience and as memory, as an image translated into signs, never adequately objectivable" (100).

Why would Ha Jin risk all the possible dangers of falling into trap of describe rape in detail? Is it simply that writing rape is a way for literature to respond to historical issues or for broader issues? Admittedly, even in most art works upon the topic of Nanking Massacre, detailed rape representation has been shunned; instead they use figures and metaphors, or sketchy descriptions.

In the two cited passages cited above, the descriptions of rape are detailed and vivid (the rapist's gesture and weapon, the spasm of scarred and bleeding bodies, the sound of moaning, even the penis dripping semen). In a word, the described rape act is so bloody and horrendous that few would consider it sensationally pornographic or erotic in its brutality. The scarred, bleeding females bodies and the Japanese soldier's dripping semen work like a cinematic technique of zooming in on a horrifying detail

that disorients the viewer in order to make them confront in through the presentation a detail the traumatizing potential of the event. In my view, Ha Jin's portrayal not only provides us with realistic documentation of sexual war crimes against humanity, but also and more importantly exercises a mode of literary representation that uses the formerly mundane detail to evoke the trauma of sexual violence.

In this sense, readers can detect the psychological effects of rape hovering over almost every character in the novel, both the victims and the witnesses. Some of the direct victims of rapes went mad and some committed suicides. Witnessing Japanese soldiers' relentless sexual violence, most female refugees felt helpless and insecure, worrying that the tragedy would happen upon them at any moment. Witnessing rape also had an indelible effect upon those maintaining this refugee camp, especially for Minnie Vautrin who later broke down under tremendous psychological pressure of blaming her incapability of saving the victims.

The historical consciousness represented by the novel offers a requiem that animates mundane details of daily survival to register the terror of occupation and the melancholy of survival. The effect of Ha Jin's prose is jarring. "A large piece of meat waiting for cutting" is the exact portrayal of female refugees' subjection to Japanese rapists, violable, fragile and docile. The victim's nakedness, bleeding sexual organ and complete submissiveness constitute passive bodies in contrast with the aggressive rapacious bodies. Under such circumstances, the victims show no intention to resist or escape; there was no way to escape. The display of sexually molested female bodies in a public setting and various responses from an assortment of people stresses how female bodies are the site of multiple boundaries, dynamics, and forces intersect.

In summary, this essay examines the horror behind mundane details in Ha Jin's 2011 novel *Nanjing Requiem*. Refusing to blame Ha Jin for trivializing the Nanjing Massacre like some critics, I argue that Ha Jin's realistic writing style adapts historical materials in thinking about how literature can rescue historical memories from the erasure of traditional historiography. This project embraces transnational perspectives of historical narratives. For me, it is not primarily important whether Nanjing Requiem is an American story or a Chinese story. Ha Jin's construction of Minnie Vautrin depends on an intercultural perspective and personal experience that has alienated him from exclusive identification with either China or the US. Jin delivers Vautrin from the shadows of being a mythical American "Goddess of Mercy" to being a conflicted bystander and witness of war atrocities.

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