

Peter O'Connor	Introduction to Journalism
Week 1	Orientation: the role of journalism

**WHAT IS JOURNALISM FOR? DOES THIS FUNCTION, HOWEVER WE DEFINE IT, HELP US DEFINE THE QUALITY OF JOURNALISTS — TELL US WHETHER THEY'RE WORTH THE PAPER THEY'RE PUBLISHED ON, OR NOT?** Here's an account that only illustrates but doesn't necessarily prove the strengths as well as the limitations of journalism, perhaps because it is in itself journalistic –anecdotal, with 'telling details' scattered here and there. It is also worth stressing that it refers to a topic which could well have been handled differently by different participants on another occasion. (It also says something about the limitations of history, especially when it becomes the subject of current affairs – international and domestic).

The occasion was a 'Book Break' held on April 2nd 2007 at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan, in Yurakucho, Tokyo: [HERE](http://www.fccj.or.jp/) <http://www.fccj.or.jp/> The book presented in the Book Break of April 2nd 2007 was *The Politics of Nanjing: An Impartial Investigation* (2007, University Press of America' by Kitamura Minoru, a historian of modern China at Ritsumeikan University. The 'floor' in this case consisted largely of journalists, most of them members of the Foreign Correspondents Club, a smattering of historians, mostly from universities around Tokyo, and the instructor on this course, there to report the event for the Club magazine, No.1 Shimbun Alley.

These Book Breaks are usually quiet affairs in which the author of a book on a topical subject gives a short talk as part of an attempt to publicise his or her work. After the talk, the book and the presentation are then opened up to questions from the floor. But this Book Break was different. What can it tell us about the role of journalism?

What drew me to the event was as much an interest in the potential audience and the sort of questions they would ask as in the book and what the author had to say about it. Attendance was around 60, but it seemed even more of a hot ticket event because of the atmosphere. In any case, space was limited because there was a buffet, so there had to be dining tables and chairs. I had already ordered and read a copy of Professor Kitamura's book, but there were no other copies on display – a slip-up by the publishers. Here's an extract from the flyer the FCCJ produced to advertise the Book Break:

## **Book Break: "The Politics of Nanjing"**

**Time:** 2007 Apr 02 18:30 - 20:30

**Summary:** Book Break: "The Politics of Nanjing"

**By** Minoru Kitamura **Language:** The speech and Q & A will be in English

**To All Members:**

What really happened in Nanjing (formerly known as Nanking) following its occupation by Japanese troops in December 1937? There are various contentious schools of thought. Some, members of what is termed "The Illusion School," hold that nothing outside the bounds of a normal conflict

occurred. “The Great Massacre School” meanwhile, agrees with the Chinese view that describes “300,000 victims” of the massacre. Inevitably, Sino-Japanese relations have been bedeviled by these varying interpretations.

Japan's “Centrist School” located not between the two but completely separate, is dedicated to examining historiographical evidence to discern what really happened after the fall of the city. Kitamura, one of Japan’s major Centrists, is a professor of modern Chinese history and used Chinese, Japanese and English sources for this study. With publication of the book in English, Kitamura expects a new wave of censure by proponents of both extremes for being too close to “the other” side.

“If these criticisms turn out to be fairly well balanced,” he writes in his introduction, “perhaps that is an indication that I have at least come close to my goal of an honest historian's analysis of an unresolvable problem.” Those expecting a one-sided view should note the citation by the then-China correspondent for the N.Y. Times: “There was little glory for either side in the battle of Nanking.”

The original book was published in November, 2001 by Bungei Shunju under the title *Nanking jiken no tankyu - sono jitsuzowo motomete*. To date, it has been reprinted seven times, an indication of its interest to Japanese readers.

Minoru Kitamura received his Ph.D. in political science from Kyoto University. He is currently a professor of history at Ritsumeikan University. He is a member of the Japan Association for Modern China Studies.

Prof. Kitamura sat at a desk at the front of the room flanked by his translator, an American author named Hal Gold, and by the Chair, who introduced them both. The Chair then gave a brief introduction to the topic and Prof. Kitamura’s work, and announced that he would speak for about 30 minutes, followed by a brief statement from Hal Gold. The floor would then open to questions.

Kitamura began by announcing that he occupied a ‘Centrist’ position in the Nanjing debate, which had been going on in Japan since at least the 1960s. The Centrists acknowledge that mass executions, rapes, and random executions of both civilians and Chinese soldiers took place but dispute the actual number of Chinese victims and question the motivation of some of those who write about the Nanjing Incident, also known as the Rape of Nanjing, the Massacre of Nanjing and so on.

As stated in the flyer above, ‘The Politics of Nanjing’ had gone into seven editions in Japan: in other words, for a history book it was unusually popular among Japanese readers (who are no different from most Western readers in preferring light fiction, cookery books and ‘How to’ books to anything dealing with challenging issues).

Prof. Kitamura then began reading from different sections of his newly translated book. He announced that time only allowed him to pick out key sections. He said that he wasn’t sure what name to use for the event: ‘massacre’, ‘incident’ and so on – and that this was why the

**‘Politics of Nanjing’ had to be written, because even in naming the event, political choices had to be made. The title of the translated book differed from the Japanese original (*Nanking jiken no tankyu - sono jitsuzowo motomete*) but that 95% of the text of the original Japanese edition had been used in the translation.**

**He first read from the back cover, as follows:**

**The events of December 1937 in Nanjing are long-standing causes of contention rooted in political differences of opinion between China and Japan. The Chinese view is unified, expressed in the “300,000 victims” engraved on the memorial walls in Nanjing, which bluntly refers to the Chinese opinion and entity of the “Great Massacre School”. Views in Japan range from complete denial to agreement with the Chinese. The Japanese government’s position of denial fuels the diplomatic clash. *The Politics of Nanjing* takes a centrist position in order to reconstruct historiographically the days leading up to and following the Japanese invasion of the capital and the political aftermath in China-Japan relations.**

**Prof. Kitamura thus firmly stated his position as being that of the ‘centrist school’ [chūkan ha] which neither denied nor accepted the Chinese position, but stood somewhere between. He seemed to see no likelihood of there being any different schools of opinion regarding Nanjing among Chinese historians and others but described it as ‘unified’. He then began reading sections of his book, starting with page 13, where the gist of the argument was that what happened in Nanjing was not the result of a fixed plan but the result of considerable ‘disorder’ among discontented and battle-weary Japanese troops following fierce resistance by the Chinese Nationalist soldiery. He quoted an American journalist in China at that time, F. Tilman Durdin, who wrote that, ‘There was little glory for either side in the battle of Nanking’ (*New York Times*, 9 January 1938). Kitamura stated: ‘that a massacre happened can easily be proved’ – an important concession in this hotly debated subject. He explained that, aided by the Nanjing Self-Government Committee composed of local Chinese, foreign missionaries and others including American and German observers, the Japanese army was as keen as any army would be to gain total control over the city following victory in the battle, and compared their mindset to that of the US military following the defeat of the Iraqi forces and the ‘capture’ of Baghdad. He said it was the ‘same situation’.**

**He quoted extensively from the documentation compiled by the Nanjing Self-Government Committee and published at the time by Kelly & Walsh, and discussed John Rabe, a local Nazi and employee of the German armaments firm Siemens Schuckert, referring to him as a ‘gentleman’. Rabe first became famous with the discovery by Iris Chang in her book, *The Rape of Nanking: the Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (Penguin 1997) of his diaries recording his experiences, later published as *The Good Man of Nanking*. Prof. Kitamura then showed how the Nanjing Self-Government Committee cooperated with the Japanese military authorities in feeding the many refugees who had fled into the Safety Zone established by the Committee: he showed that the Japanese had helped the committee in hauling food and coal for cooking and**

warmth (remember, this was December) to the refugees. Rabe was grateful to the Japanese for their help: he was not completely opposed to them, as some had claimed.

Prof. Kitamura then raised a controversial point in which he referred to what he called a national tendency to ‘cultural exaggeration’ among the Chinese people. Coming at any time, this statement would have been debatable. In this context it was not only politically incorrect, but hardly the sort of statement that would support a ‘Centrist’ argument in a book subtitled ‘An impartial investigation’. He also quoted a Chinese authority who claimed that the ‘patriotic lies of the Chinese were greater than the love of their country itself...’ Nobody would dispute that there are Chinese people who are inclined to exaggerate: this is at best statistically unavoidable, like the claim that about six out of ten people snore but that only two out of ten people admit that they snore or are aware that they snore, like the claim that the French have a weakness for frogs’ legs – plenty do not. However, the weakness of this point undermined Professor Kitamura’s case and cast doubt on his ‘impartiality’. In fact the claim could almost be described as exaggeration in itself. However, when he connected this seemingly personal and prejudiced observation with the ‘patriotic lies’ of Tiananmen Square, he seemed to be on more solid ground.

Prof. Kitamura read further excerpts from his book, then came translator Hal Gold’s contribution, in which he referred in a jovial way to the circumstances of his first meeting with Kitamura in Kyoto. The presentation ended and the questions began. Here’s a sample:

JOURNALIST (German): “You referred to John Rabe as ‘a gentleman’. In fact, John Rabe was a member of the Nazi Party. Surely, he could not by any stretch of the imagination be called a ‘gentleman’.”

KITAMURA: “I’m sorry. I’m not sure how to refer to John Rabe. A German? A man? How should I call him?”

[The point here is that Rabe was remarkable for using his power as a local Nazi member to rescue innumerable Chinese from the Japanese military. Nazi or not, to call him a gentleman would not have been an exaggeration].

JOURNALIST (American): “Professor Kitamura, can you tell me when a massacre begins for you? How many people have to be killed for it to be called a massacre? Ten? Two? Two hundred thousand? Where does it start for you? And when do you just call it ‘disorder’?”

Kitamura: “I don’t know when killing ends and massacre begins. These are emotive terms. It is not possible to be exact. Two thousand? Three thousand?”

Journalist (continuing): “Just tell me how many you think constitutes a massacre?”

KITAMURA: “I have already said, it’s impossible to put numbers on this. It’s not a matter of numbers...”

JOURNALIST: “How many?”[And so on...]

ACADEMIC (O'Connor): Can you answer one question that has been bothering me for some years now: why did the Japanese newspapers publish accounts of the ‘Killing Competition’ that took place outside Nanjing? In a time of great press control, why were they able to publish accounts which did such damage to Japan’s reputation?

KITAMURA (missing the point): “Many such accounts were published at the time as part of the normal reporting of the war in China. There was no reason not to publish such accounts...”

**JOURNALIST (French)** “Professor Kitamura, you describe yourself as a ‘Centrist’ but you do not seem to be a centrist, you seem to be fundamentally anti-Chinese...”

**KITAMURA:** “Nevertheless, I am a Centrist. I wish to say that I am a Centrist,.”

The role of journalism in this debate became increasingly at odds with the purpose of the debate: to get at some kind of historical truth. But the journalists wanted the numbers. They wanted names, dates, lines of responsibility. At the same time, Professor Kitamura was keen to point to the ‘Chinese money’ behind some of the most horrifying accounts and was keen to point to the role of Harold Timperley of the *Manchester Guardian* as one influenced by Guomindang propaganda. Thus, just as neither side came out of the battle at Nanjing covered in glory, so neither side in the Book Break, neither journalism nor the academy gained much credit from the encounter. Professor Kitamura wanted to present himself and his book as impartial, centrist accounts but they seemed far from centrist or impartial to the journalists present, and they showed their discomfort clearly in their questions, their noises offstage, and in the aggressive tone of their remarks. Nobody came out of the battle of Yurakucho covered in glory. They were arguing about **THIS** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoW2WYdOsvg>

We could easily have gone on to **THIS** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xs3JE4WRL-8> or

**THIS** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-3VzHqtCLE>

Is it really just a matter of perspective?

**There is no course textbook. Weekly downloads, for students to look through before each class, will be provided on the course website <http://www.musashino-u.ac.jp/gensha/oconnor/> which will also hold information about essay requirements, worksheets and useful links. Click on **JOURNALISM** to download and study weekly course content.**

User name and password

**Requirements:** Students will complete worksheets in class time, write a mid-term assignment from a list of titles to be provided at the beginning of the course, and take an examination in week 14.

**Assessment** You will be assessed on their attendance record and participation in class discussions, on their performance in mid-term and worksheet assignments, and their score in a multiple choice examination, all written in English, along these lines: attendance and class participation 30%, assignments 35%, examination 35%.

**NB 1:** Students are **STRONGLY** advised to take notes in this class as success in occasional worksheets, in the final essay and in the examination will require regular, close attention to course content. Writing an acceptable assignment will also require independent thinking and original research on the part of students.

**NB 2.** Note that essay grading on this course favours students who read and cite hard copies of books and articles and does not greatly reward wholly internet-based reading and research.

Week 1. **Orientation:** The role of journalism

Week 2. Print journalism and journalists: A brief history

Week 3. Press journalism

Week 4. Broadcast journalism

Week 5. Getting your facts straight

Week 6: The Boss: Press Lords real and imagined

Week 7. Journalism in film

Week 8. Journalism and Public Relations

Week 9. Journalism at war

Week 10. Reading Week: essay consultation

Week 11. Outside the Fourth Estate. **ESSAY SUBMISSION**

Week 12. The future of journalism: Matt Drudge and his heirs

Week 13. GUEST SPEAKER (subject to change)

Week 14: **EXAMINATION**

Week 15: Course Review

## Reading

*Flat Earth News: An award-winning reporter exposes falsehood, distortion and propaganda in the global media.* By Nick Davies (London: Chatto & Windus) 2008 - Three copies available in student Reading Room.

*Scoop* by Evelyn Waugh (1937)

*The First Casualty. From the Crimea to Vietnam: The war correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker* by Philip Knightley (1975)

<http://www.e-fccj.com/> - The home page of the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan (FCCJ).

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