To what extent could it be considered that Iwane Matsui was one of the military officers guilty for the 1937 Nanjing Massacre?

History HL Internal Assessment

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Identification and evaluation of sources

The question explored in this investigation is: ‘To what extent could it be considered that Iwane Matsui was one of the military officers guilty for the 1937 Nanjing Massacre?’’ The investigation will explore to what extent was and was not the Nanjing Massacre a consequence of general Iwane Matsui’s actions as the Commander-In-Chief of the Japanese troops at the time of the massacre[[1]](#footnote-1) and how justified was the conviction of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE) for his actions.

The first source to evaluated is a primary source of pages from a trial transcript of the IMTFE dated 8th of August 1946. The source gave me access to an interrogation of Iwane Matsui on the matter of the massacre, that was conducted on the 8th of March 1946. The second source to be evaluated is pages from a book written by Tanaka Masaaki, which gave me an insight into a unique perspective that was very one-sided on Matsui being innocent.

*Trial Transcript August 8, 1946* is a primary source consisting of what was discussed on one of the proceedings held during the Tribunal. It belongs to the collection of Roy L. Morgan Papers, which is a digital archive consisting of documents concerning Roy L. Morgan’s role when he was the Chief Interrogator for the International Prosecution Section of the IMFTE.[[2]](#footnote-2) The transcript includes the perspectives of Matsui and the interrogators on the matter of the massacre from an interrogation. The purpose of the actual trial transcript is to act as a written record of the discussion in the court. But the purpose of the interrogation is to serve as evidence for the court mainly to let the judges see what the defendants, in this case, Matsui’s, perspectives were. The document's content offers great value to historians investigating the topic because of its legitimacy of coming from a court proceeding, its primary source aspect as it includes words from the defendants on the specific matter and its precise nature of including detailed information.

However, only excerpts of Matsui’s interrogation were read out loud, so the transcript does not include the whole interrogation which is a significant limitation of the source. Though the source provides primary source information from the defendant themselves, there is still the limitation of only using Matsui’s interrogation partially, and not the whole of it.

*What really happened in Nanking: The Refutation of a Common Myth* (1987) is a book written by Tanaka Masaaki who was an associate of Matsui during the 1930s.[[3]](#footnote-3) Since the source is from someone who was close with Matsui during the event it adds value to the source, but there is the limitation of the book being very subjective towards one perspective only of Matsui being innocent, because of Masaaki’s relationship with Matsui and his admiration for him.

The purpose of the book being more about why the Nanjing Massacre did not happen, it offers valuable insight for a historian studying why people deny the massacre. The content of the book has the value of including many perspectives of Japanese who were there during the massacre. However, all the perspectives are limited to the same as Masaaki’s since they must support his points.

Investigation

General Iwane Matsui was charged under multiple counts[[4]](#footnote-4), which included ‘’crime of waging a war of aggression against China (count 27)’’[[5]](#footnote-5) and was convicted by the IMTFE of count 55 which meant, ‘’deliberately and recklessly disregarded their legal duty [by virtue of their respective officers] to take adequate steps to secure the observance [of the Laws and Customs of War] and prevent breaches thereof, and thereby violated the laws of war.’’ and was one of the two defendants on the Tribunal convicted only for the Nanjing Massacre.[[6]](#footnote-6) He was the Commander of the Middle China Expeditionary Forces, or Central China Area Army (CCAA) at the time of the massacre.[[7]](#footnote-7) Matsui was held accountable for organising the atrocities due to his agreement with the Japanese government on the idea of China being an auxiliary for Japan’s defence policy, and by being in cooperation with people who wanted to forward the Japanese expansion policy by force.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Moreover, according to a written verdict of the Tribunal, Matsui made the order of the need to research how to maximise Japan’s military force and put China under their control[[9]](#footnote-9), but even if this order was said by Matsui it is not a command to commit atrocities on civilians. Although the Tribunal held Matsui accountable for ordering the crimes there never was such

concrete statement made in Matsui’s diary[[10]](#footnote-10) and in his affidavit and cross-examination Matsui denied any commands of ordering, causing or permitting his troops to commit atrocities on civilians[[11]](#footnote-11), which makes the perspective of Matsui’s orders having the consequence to cause the massacre invalid. Making him not guilty of ordering the massacre directly.

After the Fall of Nanjing, the troops under Matsui’s control had complete control over the city, thus they started to commit Class C crimes in the town.[[12]](#footnote-12) There are statements for both Matsui not knowing that this was happening under his command and him being fully aware of it. According to the statement of Tanaka Masaaki, Matsui’s associate of during the 1930s[[13]](#footnote-13), Matsui himself stated that he had not heard about the Massacre until the Tribunal began.[[14]](#footnote-14) A similar kind of statement was made by Shinrokuro Hidaka, the former counsel of the Japanese Embassy in Nanjing at the time of the massacre, who stated that Matsui knew nothing of the atrocities that took place in Nanjing until long after they were committed. But this was shortly rejected by the Tribunal since there was no concrete evidence backing up his statement.[[15]](#footnote-15) Thus, if Hidaka’s statement did not have any solid evidence, there is a doubt that Masaaki’s statement neither has any evidence behind it and since there are confessions of Matsui admitting he knew what was going on, Masaaki’s statement is most likely false. Moreover, there is more evidence of Matsui admitting he knew what was going on, which has more significance to proving his accountability for the atrocities. Matsui stated that he had indeed heard of the atrocities taking place from Japanese diplomats, almost as soon as he entered Nanjing[[16]](#footnote-16) on the 17th of December 1937.[[17]](#footnote-17) More evidence for Matsui knowing what was going on is that in an interview in Sugamo Prison, he admitted that he was aware of the crimes his troops committed.[[18]](#footnote-18) Moreover, in his diary, there were diary entries from the 20th of December to the 29th of December, where he acknowledges the atrocities.[[19]](#footnote-19) Based on this you could say that Matsui had acquired the knowledge of the atrocities taking place very early on into the massacre.

Although Matsui was fully aware of the crimes happening in Nanjing, this does not make him directly guilty for the Nanjing Massacre since he never ordered the troops to behave like this.[[20]](#footnote-20) Furthermore, Matsui expressed that the discipline on the army officials’ part was excellent by the conduct but the troops’ behaviour is what was substandard. Matsui made sure to keep his troops on discipline and punish all evildoers amongst his soldiers.[[21]](#footnote-21) Moreover, there are statements from different army officials that justify this claim and help to certify the fact that Matsui never encouraged his troops to commit the atrocities. Mamoru Iinuma, the chief of Shanghai Expeditionary Army, stated that Matsui told his troops repeatedly to not commit anything illegal and Sekijirou Ogawa, the chief of Judicial Department of the Tenth Army, stated that Matsui had ordered the strict observance of military bearing and he strictly applied the law to protect civilian lives.[[22]](#footnote-22) These statements line up with what Matsui stated about his actions on the discipline practices. This further proves the argument that Matsui’s actions were not direct causation for the Nanjing Massacre.

However, there is uncertainty about did Matsui try to make a change to the poor behaviour of his troops. Matsui said that he had heard stories about what his troops did but he was never asked to make a report concerning the behaviour of the troops.[[23]](#footnote-23) He did not receive reports of the atrocities, either official or unofficial. He was only obligated to act if the information or a report came from official knowledge.[[24]](#footnote-24) Although you could say that if he did not get any official reports of the atrocities he could not act on preventing them from happening, but according to Akira Muto, the Chief of Staff of the CCAA, Matsui reprimanded his subordinates because only ten or twenty actual reports of the atrocities in Nanjing were reported.[[25]](#footnote-25) This completely overrules Matsui’s statements of not getting any reports his way but keeps the accuracy of him emphasizing on discipline. If reports did come through to Matsui while he was the commander this means that he did not do anything to prevent them himself, but this could be an inconclusive statement since Matsui did not himself admit to getting any official reports.

Moreover, Matsui was never against stopping the atrocities and according to his statements, he opted more of a friendly relation to China. He expressed in a press conference on the 18th of December that they should make the Chinese want to have friendly sentiments to the Japanese Military by self-examination on the part of the Chinese government.[[26]](#footnote-26) Thus, he stated that he was never against any intervention to the situation by foreign governments, and said that he had worked with the United States, British, and French diplomats to help Chinese refugees through donating money.[[27]](#footnote-27) Matsui supported the investigation of the massacre, with the foreign officials and diplomats. After leaving Nanjing for Shanghai, he stated that he did have a conversation with the U.S, British, French, and Italian commanders, admirals, and ambassadors to settle things peacefully.[[28]](#footnote-28) These factors could give the impression that Matsui did optimise for peace between the two countries and although he did look down on soldiers that committed the atrocities for making the military look bad,[[29]](#footnote-29) there’s no evidence of him actively trying to prevent or stop it from the massacre continuing.

In conclusion, although Matsui was charged for far worse crimes regarding the Nanjing Massacre than he was convicted for, regardless he received death by hanging. You could say that the Tribunal’s decision was too harsh since Matsui’s actions were not the direct cause of why the massacre took place and given, he did try to discipline his troops. Regardless, he did not do anything to prevent the massacre although he knew what was going on. It may not be direct, but it nonetheless is a crime against the Chinese civilians who suffered as a consequence of the Nanjing Massacre.

*Reflection*

During my investigation the aspect that I found the most challenging was finding good primary sources. Since the event that I chose as the general research topic took place in China and was done by the Japanese, a lot of sources that could have been included, for example, a book that has Matsui’s collected personal diary notes, are all in a different language. This made a barricade between me and the primary sources since there are no existing English translations of some of these sources. With secondary sources, the same problem occurred as I found books made in Japanese and Chinese of the topic, but no official translations of them have been made either. This problem conveyed the importance of the language knowledge that historians must have when investigating a topic that took place in a non-English speaking country. I can now understand why some historians choose to focus on a certain country’s history and be the expert in that field, since learning the language already takes a while before you can start your investigation.

While researching I found myself developing a subjective opinion to my research question, even though my collected evidence did not fully support that idea. Thus, highlighting the need for me to stay as objective as possible to be able to reach the most justified conclusion. This is the same for historians since when they are doing their research, they need to take into consideration every perspective of the studied topic to reach a possibly true outcome. Otherwise, there might be conclusions that completely ignore certain perspectives, which can create a general false conclusion. Historians need to go through an excessive amount of research to be able to stay away from this problem. Therefore, the role of research and an objective perspective on the historian’s part is critical when investigating history.

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