

FEATURE

A Probable Case of Selective Report

By Tzy C. Peng

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Comments on Russell Working's article: "China salutes Illinois Hero of massacre by Japan" (Chicago Tribune, 25 September 2005) and the subsequent exchanges between R. Working and Dr. Hualing Hutt, the author of *American Goddess at the Rape of Nanking: The Courage of Minnie Vautrin* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2000).

To avoid out-of-context quotes, a whole paragraph from R. Working's article is reprinted at a time in this text.

As I understand it, R. Working's article is about a dance describing the Nanjing Massacre (or the Rape of Nanking) committed by the invading Japanese military in China (1937-38) and an American missionary, Minnie Vautrin, who participated in sheltering and saving Chinese women from raping and killing by the marauding Japanese soldiers.

R. Working said (4th paragraph): *This summer and fall, in a rare turn of events, Beijing is commemorating the victims of Japanese war crimes through the eyes of a foreigner: Vautrin. In a communist country where the United States is often attacked in media and the arts, an official dance drama tells of the massacre in Nanjing as witnessed by the American woman.*

The "Nanjing 1937" Dance is about Nanjing Massacre: A holocaust-like war crime committed by the invading Japanese soldiers after they already captured the city of Nanjing (Nanking), then the national capital of China. 350,000 innocent and defenseless Chinese (men, women, seniors and children) were raped, tortured, beheaded, bayoneted, shot and buried alive in a period of 6-8 weeks (15 December 1937 near 14 February 1938).

Nanjing Massacre is a crime against humanity by any definition. It is an atrocity among many similar Japanese war crimes in

China (1894-1945) through periods of the Qing Dynasty and Republic of China (Nationalist China). Given this history, it is simply wrong to imply that this dance on Nanjing Massacre and its content are somehow a political propaganda from the People's Republic of China via Minnie Vautrin. The strong sentiment against Japanese war crimes comes from grassroots origin rather than any government: Qing Dynasty, Republic of China or People's Republic of China.

R. Working said (5th paragraph): *Another former Illinois resident is also at the center of the production "Nanjing 1937." The dance, which opened in Beijing this month and is slated to travel elsewhere in China, portrays Vautrin's ghost guiding the research of author Iris Chang, who is revered here for writing a best-selling account of the atrocity, "The Rape of Nanking," as the city was then know.*

This could be a personal interpretation by R. Workings. Iris Chang wrote her book in 1997, and Minnie Vautrin's story in English by Dr. Hualing Hu was published in 2000 (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, Illinois). However, a Chinese version of the same story by Dr. Hu was published earlier by Chiu Ko Publishing Co., Taipei, Taiwan in 1997. We can only assume that the Dance's Choreographer Tong Ruirui adopted part of the text in Iris Chang's book to describe Minnie Vautrin's role in Nanjing Massacre. Iris Chang is not just another author writing about a minor historical event. Iris Chang is a historian, humanitarian and justice

fighter, calling attention to the forgotten holocaust caused by Japanese military in China, and thereby raising the consciousness of good and moral people in the U.S. and worldwide.

R. Working said (9th paragraph): *The dance occurs at a time when a documentary and books have brought about a renewed interest in Vautrin, said Hualing Hu, the Carbondale-based author of "American Goddess at the Rape of Nanking: The Courage of Minnie Vautrin." An exhibition of Vautrin letters and photographs also opened in August in Beijing. Mean-while in Illinois, Gov.*

RodBlagojevich has declared Tuesday, Sept. 27, "Minnie Vautrin Day" in response to a request from a citizen.

That citizen is a Chinese American, Mr. Walter Ko, a dear friend of mine for more than 13 years in St. Louis, MO.

R. Working said (11th and 12th paragraphs): *But "Nanjing 1937" takes a surprising perspective: It downplays Vautrin's role in saving lives, said Aly Rose, who is dancing the Vautrin role.(Vautrin's college was part of a larger effort by foreigners credited with saving some 250,000 lives by creating places of refuge in the city.) In one scene, Vautrin saves a girl from the Japanese, but the child is later killed. "The focus of the story isn't that Minni Vautrin saved all these people." Rose said. "The focus is that Minnie Vautrin witnessed all these people dying, and Iris Chang wrote about it, and now we are going to tell you about it today, ... I kept saying, 'Could we at least have one part that testifies that she actually saved lives?'"*

The "Nanjing 1937" dance symbolizes a deep, deep wound inflicted by the invading Japanese military on the people of China. The pain and suffering that Chinese had to endure is no less than that of the Jewish people from Nazi (Germany) atrocities. If R. Working would spend some time to study the barbaric war crimes committed by Japanese military in China, he probably would have more sensitivity toward the

Chinese as a people and China as a nation. The dance is a remembrance of history on Japanese atrocities during the Nanjing Massacre. Note that to this day, the postwar Japanese government still refuses to admit Japan's war crimes in China, apologize publicly and compensate the victims directly. The heroic rescue actions of Minnie Vautrin, other Westerners and Chinese volunteers were duly noted. Thus, the dance is not intended as a personal biography for Minnie Vautrin or any other courageous individuals (Foreigners and Chinese alike).

The heroic story of Minnie Vautrin during the Nanjing Massacre was brought forth by a Chinese American, Dr. Hualing Hu, out of her deep appreciation for what Minnie Vautrin has done in saving Chinese lives. Dr. Hu spends more than five years collecting rare and precious primary sources in order to piece together truly what a humanitarian and a great person Minnie Vautrin was. Prior to that no American journalist or writer has done any comprehensive documentation on Minnie Vautrin.

Since the publication of Dr. Hu's books, (including the Chinese version) (Refs. 11 & 12), the people in China responded out of their own appreciation to Minnie Vautrin's love for China, not necessarily by order of the government. Do allow Chinese people show their gratitude in their own way. Aly Rose should read the seven specific informational questions addressed to her from Dr. Hualing Hu's email via R. Working (1 October 2005). Please remember the history, Nanjing Massacre occurred in 1937-38 under the reign of the Republic of China, not the People's Republic of China. Recently, a memorial Service and a graveside ceremony for the late Minnie Vautrin at Shepherd, MI, on 12 May 2001 with eulogies from friends (mostly Chinese Americans) and the family (Reference 1.17), Again, the major media in the U.S., except local press, did not even mention this event as a newsworthy item.

R. Working said (25th and 26th paragraphs): *The company was working to depict the rapes that gave the massacre its name.*

(Japanese nationalists insist that Chinese and Western rape and death estimates are grossly exaggerated.) Four leering male dancers stick out their tongues as they grab female partners and bend them about; the women grimace as if in agony. There is a chilling power as Rose circles the duets, pleading with Japanese soldiers, who shove her aside.

If R. Working is interested in the history of Nanjing Massacre, the contributions by and appreciation for Minnie Vautrin and others during the Nanjing Massacre, I suggest that R. Working read the extensive articles in the Chinese American Forum (CAF) magazine and well-known books by various authors written in English, Chinese and Japanese (References 1-13), and the items outlined by Hualing Hu in her email to R. Working and Aly Rose (that email is reprinted following this article). At least, Mr. Working should go to Google.com for detail information on Nanjing Massacre. The truth about Nanjing Massacre is everywhere, and can not be distorted just because Japanese ultra-nationalists want to. Besides, the Japanese ultra-nationalist claim is prejudiced by their own conflict of interests. The same argument also holds true in the denial of Nazi war crimes by the German ultra-nationalists. It is important to have an adequate understanding of history for war crimes of holocaust proportion, such as Nanjing Massacre, before casting personal opinions without sufficient foundations in facts, especially for journalists who are supposed to be factual, comprehensive and without personal bias in reporting.

Instead of recognizing the evil of the Japanese war crimes and the consequent suffering endured for so long by the Chinese people, R. Working insisted that the "Nanjing 1937" dance committed a sin because it did not have the exact statement that Aly Rose wanted about Minnie Vautrin saving lives. If R. Working via Aly Rose chose to ignore the history of Japanese aggression in China and the deep seated pain suffered by the Chinese people, then I can

only conclude that his writing is a selective and biased reporting.

As for the Quote referred to Aly Rose (29th, 30th, and 31st paragraphs): *In Rose's view, the reasons are complex for downplaying Vautrin's role in saving lives. It is hard to acknowledge the heroics of non-Chinese amid a national tragedy. After all, Chinese troops failed to protect Nanjing against the Japanese. "It would really be asking a lot to show that Minnie Vautrin saved all these people," Rose said. "It's a challenge because she's not Chinese."*

Aly Rose implied that Chinese are somehow incapable of recognizing non-Chinese people. In fact, the Vautrin role in this dance is a public recognition of non-Chinese heroes. Recognition of other non-Chinese heroes is given in Refs. 1, 4, 5, 6, 10-12. I wish Aly Rose would read the following two articles published in the Chinese American Forum magazine: (1)*Diplomats Who Saved Jews*, A Chinese diplomat and 16 others saved thousands of Jews in W.W.II, CAF, July 2000, pp. 6-9. (2)*Rabbi Abraham Cooper* (Los Angeles, CA), *The Moral Power of Memory*, A speech given at the Japanese Diet in Tokyo, Japan. CAF, July 2000, pp. 9-11. These two articles reflect the true feelings between the Chinese and Jewish people (non-Chinese): something to bear in mind before making sweeping remarks like she did.

It is also advisable for Aly Rose to take seriously information contained in Dr. Hu's email (1 October 2005 to R. Working) because the information represents genuine gratitude and admiration of Chinese people in their own way towards Minnie Vautrin and other heroic Westerners at a time of greatest suffering from Japanese atrocities. Please do not blame the innocent and defenseless Chinese victims for the evil doings of the fully armed Japanese soldiers during the Nanjing Massacre. For the same reason, no body blames the Jewish victims for the horrible Nazi's war crime in the Holocaust.

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Exchanges between R. Working and Dr. Hualing Hu

From: HualingHu@aol.com Date: October 1, 2005 12:38:31 PM CDT

To: RWorking@tribune.com (Mr. Russell Working)
Subject: Re: "China Salutes Illinois Hero of Massacre by Japanese"(Reprint with permission)

Dear Mr. Working, Hi from Colorado!

Your article "China Salutes Illinois Hero of Massacre by Japanese" was sent to me by several friends. I read the article with interest. However, I'm troubled by some misrepresentations. In the article, you state: "The dance occurs at a time when a documentary and books have brought about a renewed interest in Vautrin, said Hua-ling Hu." This is a misquotation. I never made such a statement in our entire e-mail exchanges. Nor did I have any knowledge of the dance until you stated in your final e-mail (9/2): "Please do not bother to call Prof. Zhang [Lianhong]...I'm not writing a scholarly treatise... rather, It's about the dance production 'Nanjng 1937'"

In a response to your questions on Sept. 2, I specified that "I do not believe that the government discouraged Vautrin's story from spreading," and that her story was "buried under dust for years." She was not well-known in China then. And even one of her Western counterparts in Nanjing, John Rabe, chairman of the International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone, said that he really did not know quite rightly who she was (See Rabe's diary entry of December 26, 1937). Vautrin was well-known among the grateful refugees under her protection and their families. And word spread. Yet, it was during chaotic wartime and Nanjing was under the Japanese occupation. In May 1940, Vautrin left Nanjing after suffering a nervous breakdown. Thereafter, few people knew what happened to her. I also disclosed that the Beijing edition of my book on Vautrin was published by one of the most prestigious government publishing agencies. In my e-mail of Aug. 27, I told you about China's major efforts to honor Vautrin in recent years. They include the publication of the Chinese translation of Vautrin's diary and another biography by the Research Center on the Nanjing Massacre of the Nanjing Normal University, erection of Vautrin's bronze bust on the campus of Ginling College, and production of a documentary by Shandong TV and Motion Pictures.

I'm most disturbed by Aly Rose's statements about downplaying of Vautrin's role in saving lives, i.e. "It is hard to acknowledge the heroics of non-Chinese amid a national tragedy. After all, Chinese troops failed to defend Nanjing," "It would really be asking a lot to show that Minnie Vautrin saved all these people," and "it's a challenge because she's not Chinese." This is the very first time I heard such an allegation. During my ten years of collecting materials on Vautrin's life and writing both the Chinese and English editions of her biography, I never encountered any evidence leading to such an allegation.

Now, I would like to ask Ms. Rose the following questions:

1. Does she know that the Chinese Nationalist government, who failed to defend Nanjing, secretly awarded Vautrin the Order of the Jade to thank her on July 30, 1938 as soon as information of her protection of the refugees reached its temporary seat in southwest China (Vautrin's correspondence, E.Clubb of the American consulate to Vautrin, Jan. 23, 1939, in a letter marked "*confidential*")?

2. Does she know that Vautrin's heroic story and the number of refugees (10,000 plus) protected by her are engraved on the base of her bronze bust in Nanjing and printed on the back cover of the Beijing version of my book?
3. Does she know that the People's Daily in December 2000 carried an article to introduce my book and describe Vautrin's deeds and the number of refugees under her protection?
4. Has she read the content of Vautrin's biography published by the Research Center on the Nanjing Massacre?
5. Does she know that the insightful documentary on Vautrin's courage produced by the Shandong TV and Motion Pictures was broadcast on the CCTV?
6. When she was in Nanjing, did she talk with any civilians on the street or leading scholars on the Massacre such as Prof. Zhang Lian-hong?
7. Does she know that, in addition to Vautrin, other "non-Chinese" such as Rev. John Magee and Mr. John Rabe of the Nanjing Safety Zone are also honored in China for their efforts to protect Chinese refugees during the Nanjing Massacre? Has she seen Rabe's bronze bust or visited the library in honor of Magee?

I hope that Ms. Rose will answer the above questions. And I hope that she will provide solid evidence for her allegation of "down-playing" and "non-Chinese." As a trained historian and Vautrin's biographer authorized by her niece Mrs. Emma Lyon, I await any new evidence, not speculation.

Finally, there are some errors in your article. For instance, Vautrin was born in 1886, not 1887, and she died at age 55, not 53. Also, the eve of the Nanjing Massacre, as one measure to protect Ginling, Vautrin asked the servants to raise eight American flags surrounding the campus and a thirty-foot flag over its quadrangle (Vautrin's diary, December 1, 1937), not only one flag. I know that you are an award-winning author and accomplished reporter. I sincerely hope that you would retract the misquotation and misrepresentation. Thank you for your interest in Minnie Vautrin.

Sincerely, Hua-ling Hu, Ph.D. Author of *American Goddess at the Rape of Nanking: The Courage of Minnie Vautrin*.

P.S. As you may know, Mr. Walter Ko [A Chinese American] is the citizen who has facilitated Gov. Blagojevich's proclamation to honor Vautrin.