

The Nanjing Massacre Memorial: ‘Remember the Past, But Not for Revenge’ (前事不忘，后事之师)

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图表 1 Dimly lit Historical Exhibition Zone

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These days, when I scroll through the headlines: Gaza's bombed-out hospitals, Ukrainian mothers weeping over children's graves, Yemeni families starving under barrier and suddenly the Chinese proverb “历史是最好的教科书” (History is the best textbook) echoes painfully in my mind. My recent visit to Nanjing's Massacre Memorial Hall (南京大屠杀纪念馆) made me to stand against an unpleasant reality that people keep rewriting the same tragedy in different languages. Our world, 87 years after the horrors of Nanjing, remains the opposite of the central inscription on the memorial in Nanjing: Remember the past to instruct the future. Yet we continue to turn peoples into numbers and cities into graveyards. Passing the Wall of Names where 300,000 people forgotten by history whisper with the word, I knew we are mastering the art of remembrance but we require failing the learning test. The shoes left behind by children in Gaza today are the same sad story in Nanjing in 1937.

The moment I stepped into the dimly lit Historical Exhibition Zone, the temperature dropped and I felt as if the time collapsed. The ghosts like black-and-white photos on the walls were hanging. I touched the stone slabs with blood traces which were from massacre sites, created a goosebump on my body. It was showing actual remains of live history. Bustling tea houses, children flying kites along the Qinhuai river, students in uniforms outside Nanjing University, showed ordinary life of Nanjing. A market scene, a schoolyard, a family picture but I knew these were all taken just days before the massacre.

The "Pit of Ten Thousand Corpses" (万人坑) was the most shocking scene ever I saw, which turned my blood to ice. Skeletons curled into fetal positions, skulls with gaping holes, the single sided broken ribs were not just bones, but an unheard cry. A nearby screen where it was played fighter evidences on repeat: "They bayoneted my sister while she begged in Japanese language as she had studied their language!" A video by one of the old man ended with sentence, "我活下来了，但他们没有..." ("I survived, but they didn't..."). The Japanese soldiers' diaries "Killed 200 today." was the commonness of evil where it showed that they were enjoying competing each other killing people.

Entering into the Outdoor Memorial Zone, the burden in my heart eased not because the sorrow faded, but because the pain was given space to breathe. The statue of a "Mother Searching for Lost Child" made me hold the breath where her hollow eyes and outstretched arms impressed a universal language of loss. Across the way, the "Path of Survivors", underfoot bronze footprints of those who walked through hell, each pair a story I couldn't bear to imagine yet. At the reflection pool, I found myself staring at the water's perfect mirror of the sky so still compared to the chaos of history. The bell nearby was silently ringing the tune of peace. Other visitors stood calm and some leaving flowers. A Japanese tourist knelt to touch the survivor footprints was captured by my eyes which made me more thoughtful. This wasn't just sadness but was the first step toward carrying the heavy heart together. The statues didn't let me look away, but the sunlight and rustling trees whispered: "Remember, but keep living."

Stepping into the sunlit Peace Park, the transition from the memorial's solidity felt almost strange. The white doves flying over there is not just symbols, but living evidences that reconciliation is possible. The "Wall of Peace" was facing me with the inscription "前事不忘，后事之师" ("Remember the past to instruct the future") repeated in languages from the present

war-zones in the world. In that moment, it struck me: China built this space not to dwell in pain, but to plant seeds of harmony, a plain contrast to today's world where Gaza's children dig through ruins.

In the Gallery of Hope, I paused before a child's drawing from Syria, a stick-figure family under a rainbow, labeled "Peace for everyone" in middle east. Nearby, pledges from global visitors covered a wall: "Never again." The "Mother and Child" statue, depicting a modern Chinese woman cradling her baby, seemed to answer the wartime "Mother Searching for Lost Child" sculpture, a cycle of grief broken by new life.

Yet the park's most powerful lesson was its quiet defiance of today's conflicts. As I watched a dove alight near the engraved names of massacre victims, I thought of China's consistent calls for ceasefire negotiations and its aid shipments to middle-east actions mirroring this memorial's ethos. The park doesn't just memorialize Nanjing's dead; it challenges every visitor: "Will you let history repeat, or work to rebuild what hate destroys?"

Leaving, I carried a paradox, deep sorrow for humanity's failures, but stubborn hope in our capacity to choose differently. In a world on fire, this green space with its flying doves and children's art feels like both a composition and a blueprint.

The Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall was not just a museum; it was a powerful emotional and educational experience that changed our perspective on war, history, and human resilience. I didn't just visit a museum; I witnessed humanity's darkest hour and brightest hope. We left with a deeper appreciation for China's history and a renewed commitment to peace.

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

George Santayana



Fig. 1. statue of Minnie Vautrin saving children



Fig. 2. A mass grave site excavated on the site of the NMM



Fig. 3. Stone slabs with blood strip in the NMM



Fig. 4. Fighters drees, shoes and bombs



Fig. 5. The ruined structure in the NMM



Fig. 6. Mother saving babies looking danger from sky