

## A Facilitator's Reflections on Remembering Nanjing 2011

Armand Volkas, MFA, MA, MFT, RDT/BCT

Associate Professor, California Institute of Integral Studies

Clinical Director, The Living Arts Counseling Center

Director, Living Arts Playback Theatre Ensemble

Director, Healing the Wounds of History Institute

Forty Chinese and Japanese graduate students are gathered in a circle in a conference room at Normal University in Nanjing, China in October, 2011 to address the legacy of the Nanjing Massacre. A Japanese man falls to the ground weeping as he prostrates himself before the tiny frail figure of the 83 year-old partially blind survivor of what has become known as "The Rape of Nanking". In Japanese culture this deep bowing gesture can express profound shame, apology and submission. The man begs for forgiveness on behalf of his ancestors. In 1937 in the Chinese city of Nanjing, Japanese soldiers had entered her home and murdered her parents and grandparents, raped and killed her 13 year old and 15 year old sisters in front of her eyes. When she protested their actions they stabbed her 3 times with their bayonets as she slipped into unconsciousness. They left her for dead. The survivor was seven years old at the time. She awoke, bloodied and barely alive, to the terrorized cries of her 4-year old sister crying for her mother. Her childhood abruptly over, she became her sister's caregiver and, together, they hid from the Japanese perpetrators and somehow made it to the "safe zone".

*The Japanese man speaks to the old woman through his tears and his voice cracks with anguish, "The memory of your suffering will not be forgotten!" With a mixture of deep empathy and pain, the survivor raises the Japanese man to his feet. "It was the actions committed by the Japanese militarists. You were not there. It is not your fault." The man, feeling the shame of his country's past and*

*not knowing where to place it or how to move through it, humbly withdraws back into the circle of Chinese and Japanese workshop participants bearing witness to the survivor's story.*

This moving and spontaneous ritual of apology and forgiveness was at the heart of the encounter between Japanese and Chinese participants gathered to face the legacy of the Nanjing Massacre—the event that has become the symbol of the wound between these two powerful countries. The group of participants, made up of second and third post-World War II generations, had all agreed to gather in Nanjing to immerse themselves in the historical trauma and collective memory of the War. Ambivalent, yet driven by their curiosity as well as a spiritual need to reveal the ghosts that haunt their cultures, the participants ventured into uncharted emotional territory.

By apologizing, the Japanese man is breaking an enormous taboo against confronting the legacy of the Nanjing Massacre in a direct way. Nanjing is a very controversial subject in Japan. There is a national ambivalence about accepting responsibility for war crimes. It is too humiliating and brings shame upon the collective. The cultural values around “saving face” prevent Japanese society from direct reflections of its legacy. This Japanese man is also apologizing on the very soil where the crimes took place. Such a remorseful stance requires courage on the part of Japanese participants. One must acknowledge the potential of them becoming targets of right wing wrath if their activities are found out and publicized in their country.

So why would Japanese citizens fly all the way to China at their own expense to apologize for crimes that they did not themselves commit? What human need is driving this impulse? Is the goal of the “Remembering Nanjing” project to just provide a way for individuals to work through the burden of their historical inheritance? Or, is there a collective or social change goal?

Are we as project organizers and therapists, in effect, making a therapeutic intervention upon Japanese and Chinese societies? By bringing delegations of Japanese students to Nanjing in 2007, 2009 and again in 2011 are we modeling what we

believe that Japanese and Chinese societies need to do in order to heal and become whole again after the trauma of World War II? Do personal and collective apologies on the part of Japanese people have any meaning now that the perpetrators and victims of these atrocities have all but disappeared into the mists of historical memory?

If we decide that they do have meaning and value, then what are the next steps we need to take in the *Remembering Nanjing* initiative, however powerful and moving they are, to have a real impact on the Sino-Japanese relationship? How do we prevent our innovative acts of reconciliation from simply dissolving into the vast ocean of intercultural conflict and misunderstanding?

These are the questions that I asked myself as I came to Nanjing in October of 2011. Having facilitated a previous *Remembering Nanjing* project in 2009 (Volkas, 2010), I once again brought my skills as a drama and expressive arts therapist and theatre worker to the process. My Healing the Wounds of History approach to intercultural conflict and collective trauma was the model used to address the legacy (Volkas, 2003, 2007, 2009, 2010). Healing the Wounds of History integrated improvisation, psychodrama, sociodrama, expressive arts therapy, drama therapy, Playback Theatre and therapeutic processes with a psychological, emotional and spiritual exploration of the impact of the Nanjing Massacre on the generations after the War.

*A stream of Chinese and Japanese participants take turns paying homage to the Nanjing Massacre survivor, aware that she is one of the last witnesses of this terrible chapter of history. One at a time they share the impact that the survivor's story has had on them. A Chinese man in his late twenties speaks to the old woman, "Beloved 'grandmother', I feel your deep capacity for forgiveness. You suffered so much, yet you have a big and generous heart. When I hear your story, a deep hatred rises up within me that I don't know how to transform. By your example, I will try to make my heart as spacious as yours. Thank you 'grandmother' for allowing us to bear witness to your story."*

When a Chinese encounters a Japanese person the millions of dead between them create a chasm that is difficult to bridge. China's historical wounds are deep. The past has not been forgotten. The war launched by Japan's militarist leaders killed

an estimated 20 million Chinese—an enormous collective trauma that still reverberates within the culture. At the same time both Japan and China are attempting to forge a new economic alliance, but the ghosts of history continue to haunt the relationship between these two powerful nations. Therefore, one can conclude that Japanese people coming to China to apologize, in effect, becomes a political act as well as a personal one.

What is the structure and meaning of personal and collective apology and does it have the power to heal historical trauma? If so, can drama and the expressive arts be used as tools in constructing a successful apology between Japan and China?

Apology is not just uttering the words, “I’m sorry”. Apology is in reality a performance. It is a performance of authenticity. In an apology it is necessary to show sorrow, remorse, shame and humility. It must have affect, vulnerability, and sincerity to be accepted and reveal deep, painful regret. These feelings are part of the guilt people experience when they have done something wrong and take full responsibility. At its best, the apology is cleansing and purifying. It cannot take away or undo what has been done, but somehow, in the logic of it, it does. In the end, apology is an exchange of shame and power. I believe that under certain conditions apologies have the capacity to heal.

*A large black marble memorial stone in the shape of a tablet sits atop a rock formation overlooking the Yangtze River. There are 25 narrow steps leading up to the top. The story of what happened at this very site in 1937 is engraved in Mandarin on the face of the stone. A Chinese participant who also speaks Japanese reads the inscription so that the Japanese students gathered can understand. Her voice cracks with emotion as she recites. 74 years earlier tens of thousands of civilians were reported slaughtered by the invading Japanese army on this very spot. It is said that the river ran red with blood during those days of carnage. Bound together with rope in large groups by the river for easy disposal, the victims were machine gunned en masse. The corpses of men, women and children then floated through the heart of the city of Nanjing further ter-*

rorizing the already traumatized populace.

*Silently, two by two and side by side, a Japanese student and a Chinese student walk up the wobbly steps to the memorial stone together. They both place a flower at its base and then bow in honor of the people who have perished there taking another moment to reflect in silence. The students circle the stone disappearing from the view of their gathered witnesses for a moment. They re-emerge from behind the stone bowing together once more before descending the steps hand in hand as another pair of Japanese and Chinese students ascend the mound and repeat the same ritual.*

*Later, the groups take turns standing around the memorial stone separately as a group silently acknowledging the differences in the pain of descendants of perpetrators and victims. On the fourth and last day of the “Remembering Nanjing” encounter, both Japanese and Chinese move deeply into their collective grief. The Chinese participants spontaneously begin to shout slogans learned in childhood that express their determination as a people to stay strong in the face of future adversity as they feel deeply the trauma of victimization. One can hear the tinge of anger in their voices as they cry out. They vow never again to be weak and vulnerable as a country. Encircled together, the Japanese express the heavy burden of their legacy of perpetration. Their bent bodies and bowed heads express their deep collective remorse. Some in the group utter the anguished cries of the pain of inherited perpetration and their weeping voices pierce the silence of the somber ceremony.*

This is the third time that this ritual has been performed. First initiated in 2007, it has become one of the culminating acts of the gathering in Nanjing. The ritual has kept its basic shape with slight variations in its staging each year. Ritual and indirect communication styles are inherent parts of Japanese and Chinese cultures. The ceremony at the Yangtze River becomes an apt container for the grief that both groups feel. In effect, the ceremony becomes a ritual and performance of apology where the Japanese, by coming to the site of the atrocities, acknowledge and express

remorse for the evil deeds of their ancestors. Each time that this ritual is performed it achieves a simple yet moving aesthetic. There is a major tenet of drama and expressive arts therapy at work here—the principle being that the more beautiful one can make a ritual or therapeutic moment, the greater is its potential to heal and transform. In the altered state created by the ritual, overwhelming feelings are contained and the Japanese apology is expressed.

As moving and beautiful as this ritual and the entire *Remembering Nanjing* process was to facilitate and witness, it still felt somehow incomplete to me. In 2009, I left Nanjing with a similar sense that there were more layers of personal emotion that could be peeled away. Reflecting upon my experience working with multiple intercultural conflicts using the Healing the Wounds of History method, I have observed that there is often an impulse for two polarized groups to quickly grasp onto the warmth and intimacy easily created through creative arts therapy processes. Participants feel surprising relief that “enemies” can actually like each other and have things in common and may conclude that their goal of reconciliation has been achieved. However, this intimacy is often created before delving deeper to explore and express more difficult feelings such as hurt, shame and rage. So, although we were in the very last phase of our workshop and logically should have been working towards closure, I decided to take a risk to re-open the historical wounds. I wanted the participants to take a deeper look at the feelings that had not yet been completely expressed. I knew that there could not be true apology and reconciliation between Japanese and Chinese participants without this honesty. Could both groups tolerate unflinching self-examination while holding on to the hard fought intimacy that they had created?

*After the ritual at the Yangtze River I speak to the participants gathered once again in the large conference room at Normal University, “We only have a few hours left in our time together. In the afternoon we will move towards closure. The ritual was quite moving. It gave us a container to put all of our feelings of grief that have been*

*stirred up the last few days. But, before we move on to saying goodbye, I want us to take another look at the art of apology because that is at the heart of our work together. We are in a feeling space right now, but during the next few hours I would like you to step back and look at what is happening inside of you. We are going to use ourselves as a kind of emotional laboratory and examine what steps are involved in an apology and how they may be applied to the Japanese and Chinese relationship.”*

There are 8 basic steps involved in personal and collective apology distilled from my research. They are outlined as follows:

1. The breach, the violation or the offensive act.
2. The spoken or unspoken call for an apology.
3. The acknowledgement and recognition that the injury has damaged the bonds between the offending and offended parties.
4. Taking responsibility and being accountable for one's role in the event.
5. The performance of the apology in which regret, sorrow, remorse, shame and humility are expressed.
6. Forgiveness is given—if the event is forgivable or accepted. Rejection of forgiveness is a possibility and is not a required part of apology.
7. Emotional and or material reparations or restitution is an indispensable part of an acceptable apology but not always possible. Sometimes nothing can be done to right the wrong.
8. An explicit or implied promise to change and a commitment that it won't happen again are made.

*Back in the workshop, the eight steps of apology are given archetypal titles and are written on a flip chart in Mandarin and Japanese:*

1. *The Breach*
2. *The Call for an Apology*
3. *The Acknowledgement*

4. *Taking Responsibility*

5. *The Apology*

6. *Forgiveness*

7. *Reparation*

8. *The Promise*

*The Japanese and Chinese participants are paired up and work together to create an enactment. They collaborate to explore the dynamics of apology in an embodied way. Each dyad creates a human sculpture with eight images representing the eight phases of apology, using their bodies to express the essence of each step. The images are then performed in front of the group, three dyads at a time.*

*I call out the title of each step. As I do, each group moves in slow motion through the cycle of the apology process creating a frozen image for each phase. This process is visually impactful and becomes a way for the group to internally integrate and understand apology in a non-linear way. Every image becomes a sort of diorama seared into minds of the participants.*

According to psychiatrist Aaron Lazare (Lazare, 2004), leading authority on the psychology of shame, humiliation, and apology, successful apologies need to satisfy at least some distinct psychological needs of the offended party to be successful and transformative. Among the most important needs are the necessity for restoration of self-respect and dignity. Humiliation is the emotional response of people to their perception that they have been unfairly lowered, debased, degraded, disrespected, or reduced to inferior positions in situations in which they feel powerless.

In the Japanese and Chinese relationship, Chinese people have a need to regain their self-respect and dignity in the face of the enormous humiliation they experienced during the War. They have a need to regain face. Throughout our 4-day workshop Chinese participants expressed feelings of humiliation and shame that their large and dignified country was weak and taken over by the tiny country of



Japan. The lack of acknowledgement on the part of the Japanese government and many from the right wing in Japan who deny that the atrocities even occurred, create a feeling of invisibility. This produces a quiet rage towards Japan within Chinese society. This rage was palpable, but largely unexpressed among the Chinese *Remembering Nanjing* participants until the end when I decided to enter into the following sociodramatic enactment.

*I stand before the group and set two chairs facing each other at the front of the room. I instruct the group on the guidelines for the next sociodramatic exercise, "This chair represents the angry and defiant Chinese face or mask. When you sit in this chair you show the angry Chinese stance expressing that what happened to your country will never ever happen again. You vow to become strong and protect China from the kind of humiliation inflicted upon you by the Japanese during World War II. But, if you stand, sit or kneel behind the Chinese chair, you express your feelings from the hurt and vulnerable place that lives behind the mask. If China were a person, what do you say from the wounded child place within you? What do you feel and what do you need from Japanese people from this wounded place?"*

*I now refer to the opposing chair, "When you sit in this chair you represent the Japanese angry and defiant face or mask. This external stance represents and expresses the extreme defensive and defiant voice in Japanese society. When you sit in this chair you show your anger, defiance, your denial and your refusal to take responsibility for what your armies did in Nanjing and in all of Asia during World War II. But, if you stand, sit or kneel behind this chair you express your feelings from the hurt and vulnerable place that lives behind the external Japanese mask. If the country of Japan were a person, what would you say from the wounded child place within you? What do you feel and what do you need from Chinese people? What are your emotional needs and rights as the descendants of soldiers who committed these atrocities?"*

*One by one the Chinese and Japanese begin to step into their collective roles. They speak both personally and from the group:*

*Chinese Man (In the chair): “The sins of the father shall be visited upon the children”. You must accept what your ancestors have done. Japan, this is your fate and your responsibility!*

*Chinese Woman (In the chair): Only a few Japanese prime ministers have had the courage to apologize to us! Germany apologized to its victims. Only about one tenth of Japanese politicians apologize. They are cowardly and they don’t understand the pain of China!*

*Japanese Man (Behind the chair): I don’t want to show my weakness to Chinese people. This would be too shameful. I need to create armor around me and protect myself. I don’t want to accept the truth. I am very frightened!*

*Japanese Man (In the chair): Stop your whining! China, you have killed so many people in recent history. You are taking the higher moral ground and it is hypocritical. So get off your high horse and stop judging us!*

*Japanese Man (In the chair): We need you China. We are now economically dependant on you. I fear that within 100 years we will be colonized by you. You are growing so fast! You are driven by your anger and are becoming so powerful!*

*Chinese Woman (In the chair): Economy is war! Japan, why you are crying?*

*Armand: I am now going to remove the two chairs that represent the mask or face of the Chinese and Japanese people. I would like you to speak to each other without the protection of the mask. Speak from the personal and the collective. Say what is in your hearts. What do you feel and what do you need from each other?*

*Chinese people, do you want an apology from your Japanese friends?*

*Twenty Japanese and twenty Chinese now stand and face each other from their group identities.*

*Japanese Woman: I want us to stop our fighting! I want Japan to stop hurting China by acknowledging the truth of our history as painful as it is.*

*Chinese Woman: We have been looked down upon. We have been humiliated. We have been bullied, not just by Japan but by other countries too. This is a heavy burden for us. Do you want us to look at this humiliating history and be hurt by it over and over again? I can’t take my friends to The Nanjing Massacre Museum*

*because I don't want them to be hurt either. I know that your Emperor has no power anymore and is just a symbol for Japan. But, I believe that the Emperor could help put a period at the end of this history. I want the current Emperor to come to China and the Nanjing Massacre Museum and apologize. This could heal both countries and save them from their terrible histories.*

*Chinese Man: We are not trying to wallow in our victimization. We just want you to see the truth. I want other Japanese people to know. Once they know, then there can be changes in our relationship. We need you to see the truth!*

*Japanese Man: It is a difficult truth, but we are willing to see it. (Several Japanese people express this sentiment).*

*Chinese Woman: We want you to actively try to do something.*

*Armand: So, you want them to take action?*

*Chinese Woman: Yes!*

*Chinese Woman: We don't want you to grovel on your knees and apologize without dignity. All we want is for you to know our history.*

*Chinese Woman: I want our wounded hearts to join together and become one.*

*Chinese Man: We want the Japanese government to represent the Japanese people and to do something about the legacy of the War. When the Japanese army came to China, the first thing that they did was to put a Japanese flag on our land. It wasn't France or Germany. It was Japan. Your arrogance was deeply hurtful and humiliating.*

*Japanese Woman: When you talk about the Japanese government I feel powerless. I feel overwhelmed. I feel like I have no real power over the policies of our government. Right now you are communicating with us what is truly in your heart. It is a relief to hear your anger because we know that it is there. I am deeply grateful that you are doing this for us.....that you are telling us your truth.*

*Japanese Man: You keep on talking about the right wing in Japan. But, there are also so many teachers and researchers who have been fighting to reveal the truth after the War. But we encounter the voice of hatred from you, the Chinese people. We have the impulse to give up on this topic. It is very demoralizing. We also need*

*your support and encouragement please!*

*Armand: Are you saying that you would like the Chinese participants to acknowledge and appreciate what you have done and the ways in which you are changing?*

*Several Japanese Participants: Yes!*

*Armand: Chinese participants, are you willing to share with your Japanese friends what the impact of their gesture of coming to Nanjing has meant for you and the changes you have seen?*

*Chinese Woman: Our history is very heavy. I hope that in our process we are able to take some of the load off of your backs. Japanese people, thank you for coming to Nanjing! Your gesture is deeply meaningful to us. Please don't give up!*

*Chinese Woman: I know you have to deal with the pressures of the right wing in Japan. I know that there are other people in Japan who, like yourselves, have their own enlightened feelings and thoughts about our collective history. I would like to express a deep respect for these people. I would like to express a deep respect for you!*

*Chinese Man: I will work with you to make a better world!*

*Armand: This process has been painful, but necessary. What do we need to do right now?*

*There is tense silence as participants consider what they want to do.*

*Chinese Woman: I would like to shake hands with my Japanese friends, because we all want peace in the world.*

*Chinese Man: I would like to work together with them towards this same goal.*

*Armand: Do you want to shake hands?*

*Chinese Woman: I would like to hug and hold my Japanese friends.*

*Armand: Shake hands with or embrace each other if you feel moved to do so.*

*One by one, the Japanese and Chinese participants shake hands. Most embrace each other and shed tears as a release of the tension that had built up between the two groups during the sociodrama.*

Through this painful, yet moving, closing encounter between Japanese and Chinese citizens, the participants learned that they could tolerate and survive a

heated and direct confrontation about the legacy of the war and come out with their friendships, not only intact, but deeper and stronger. Through the use of sociodrama as an intervention in The Healing the Wounds of History process, the group was able to bypass some of the taboos related to “saving face”, an important value in both cultures. How can one apologize and “save face” without bringing shame upon your family, society and country? This is the ongoing challenge that has political implications in the Sino-Japanese relationship. However, using the two chairs in the workshop to represent the external mask or “face” of China and Japan and asking the Japanese and Chinese participants to speak from a collective group voice, gave them permission to speak more freely and authentically. Many of the direct and provocative statements participants made as a collective in this exercise might not have been uttered if the people were asked to express them personally as individuals.

\*\*\*\*\*

In this brief article, there is no way that I could include all of the remarkable moments in this transformative 4-day encounter. I hold them in my heart and mind and they will infuse my future work with groups in conflict.

I would like to thank Dr. Kuniko Muramoto, Ph.D. for organizing *Remembering Nanjing* and Dr. Zhang Lianhong, Ph.D. for hosting the gathering at Nanjing Normal University for the third time. I would also like to thank Dr. Haru Murakawa, Ph.D. for his leadership role in the Remembering Nanjing initiative and for his extraordinary vision of reconciliation between China and Japan nearly 20 years ago that ultimately led to the encounter in Nanjing. To my friend, colleague and frequent Healing the Wounds of History collaborator, Aya Kasai, thank you for your ongoing commitment to healing collective trauma throughout Asia and for your sensitive and artful Japanese/English interpreting. I could not do this work in Japan and China without your support. Thank you as well to fellow drama therapist and Playback Theatre artist, Eddie Yu, who generously served as Mandarin/English interpreter, consultant and co-facilitator. Eddie Yu and Kayo Munakata beautifully facilitated the Playback Theatre performance on the third evening. The image of the actors and musicians from Playback Theatre AZ from Japan and Friends Playback Theatre in

China brilliantly improvising personal stories together in Mandarin and Japanese is forever seared into my mind-----a symbol of Chinese and Japanese collaboration and reconciliation. The role of the Playback actors and their capacity to create an immediate culture of empathy deepened the Healing the Wounds of History process and contributed enormously to the success of Remembering Nanjing 2011. Thank you actors for your deep emotional generosity. Also, many thanks to Luo Cuicui for her tireless Japanese/Chinese translation----you were the glue that held our delicate process together. Finally, thank you to all of the Remembering Nanjing participants who trusted us and became the emotional pioneers for their countries. They took the risks and paved the way towards healing collective trauma that others can now follow.

- A.V., November, 2011

## References

- Davis, Laura, *I Thought We'd Never Speak Again: The Road from Estrangement to Reconciliation* (pp. 226–238), New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2002.
- Lazare, Aaron, *On Apology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Leveton, E. & Volkas, A., (2010) Healing the Wounds of History: Germans and Jews Facing the Legacy of the Holocaust. In *Healing collective trauma using sociodrama and drama therapy*, Leveton, E (Ed.), (pp. 127–146) New York, NY: Springer.
- Miller, R. & Volkas, A., (2007) Healing the Wounds of History. In A. Blatner & D. Wiener (Eds.), *Interactive and improvisational drama: Varieties of applied theatre and performance* (pp. 34–44). New York: iUniverse.
- Volkas, A. (2003). Armand Volkas keynote address. *Dramascope: The Newsletter of the National Association for Drama Therapy*, 23(1), 6–9.
- Volkas, A. (2009) Healing the Wounds of History: Drama Therapy in Collective Trauma and Intercultural Conflict Resolution. In D. Johnson & R. Emunah

(Eds.), *Current approaches in drama therapy* (pp. 145–171), Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

Volkas, A., (2010) Healing the Wounds of History: Japanese and Chinese Cultures Facing the Legacy of the Nanjing Massacre., *In Ritsumeikan human services research*, Muramoto, K. (Ed.), (pp. 130–156), Kyoto, Japan: Institute of Human Sciences, Ritsumeikan University.