Early-twentieth-century China was a country in turmoil, witnessing such events as the Boxer Rebellion, the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, the Sino-Japanese War, and the Chinese Civil War. Of these events, the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45), which resulted in the Japanese occupation of Shanghai, Nanjing, and Northern Shaanxi, has captured the attention and imagination of historians, film makers, and fiction writers. In particular, the Rape of Nanjing has become the center of focus in this war, not least because of the atrocities perpetrated by the invading Japanese army against the inhabitants of Nanjing, atrocities that have become the subject of historical scholarship and literary representation. When Chinese immigrants in America describe the Sino-Japanese War, they not only identify a major source of national trauma in twentieth-century Chinese history but also clarify that any sense of Chinese American belonging in the United States can never be free from American political involvement in the Asia-Pacific world.

In Chinese American literature, the Sino-Japanese War has been invoked as the historical backdrop of works as different as Eileen Chang’s Lust, Caution (1979), a short story made into a prize-winning film directed by Ang Lee, and Ha Jin’s Nanjing Requiem (2011). Lust, Caution is about a patriotic student radical called on to seduce an intelligence agent of the occupying government to lure him to his death, and Nanjing Requiem honors the life of Minnie Vautrin, “The Living Goddess of Nanjing,” celebrating the organizers of the Nanjing Safety Zone.
who offered refuge to desperate Chinese fleeing the Japanese occupation of the city. With the publication of *Nanjing Requiem*, Chinese American literature gives the Rape of Nanjing a thematic centrality not previously available.

The Rape of Nanjing, the event that crystallizes the brutality of the Japanese invasion of China, is a topic that has generated controversy and contesting interpretations. There are those who question the veracity of historical and eye-witness accounts of this event just as there are others who are convinced it is their moral duty to bring to the attention of the world the war atrocities committed at Nanjing. In 1997 Iris Chang published *The Rape of Nanking* to draw attention to the atrocities committed by the invading Japanese army against hapless inhabitants of the ancient city of Nanjing. Chang tells us that her reason for doing so is to tell the story of “the forgotten holocaust of World War II,” a historical event that must never be forgotten. Central to the discourse of the Rape of Nanjing are both the extent of the carnage inflicted by the Japanese and the degree to which this violence has (not) been accorded ample recognition in world history. Growing up in China during World War II, fleeing to Taiwan, and later migrating to the United States, Chang’s parents impressed on her the importance of remembering “the horrors of the Sino-Japanese War.”

In 2011 Ha Jin published *Nanjing Requiem*, a novel that brings the reader back in time to the Japanese occupation of Nanjing and contributes to the growth of recent interest in the subject as evidenced by documentaries and films such as Bill Guttentag and Dan Sturman’s *Nanking* (2007), Lu Chuan’s *City of Life and Death* (2009), Florian Gallenberger’s *John Rabe* (2009), and Zhang Yimou’s *The Flowers of War* (2011). In *Nanjing Requiem*, the narrator Anling observes that “most people are good at forgetting,” to which Minnie Vautrin responds that “history should be recorded as it happened so it can be remembered with little room for doubt and controversy” (*NR* 97). Jin’s diary-like narrativization of events, focused on the activities of the Nanjing Safety Zone and Vautrin’s Jinling College, resists the poststructuralist premise that history cannot be interpreted with clarity and certitude. The novel recounts events that daily took place: rape, killings, and desperate attempts to escape harm. Much of the suspense is built on trauma experienced as parents await news of children who have been abducted, young