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Chinese commemorate start of war with Japan 70 years ago

The Associated Press

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BEIJING: China kept alive the memory of Japan's WWII-era aggression as it marked the 70th anniversary Saturday of a gunbattle that led to a Japanese invasion and at least 150,000 Chinese deaths.

Hundreds of veterans and students gathered for a low-key ceremony at the Marco Polo Bridge, where Japanese and Chinese troops exchanged fire on July 7, 1937, starting an eight-year conflict that ended with Tokyo's World War II surrender.

People at the Marco Polo Bridge signed a banner imploring people not to forget the war's dark memories, state-run China Central TV news reported.

Students visited veterans' homes and listened to speeches. People gathered for exhibitions, memorials and anti-Japanese songs in more than 10 cities across the country, it reported.

Theaters across China held special screenings of "Nanking," an American documentary about the invasion.

Historians generally agree the Japanese army killed at least 150,000 civilians and raped tens of thousands of women in the rampage in the city of Nanjing in 1937, an incident that became known as "The Rape of Nanking" — the name by which the city was known in the West at that time.

In Japan, the anniversary was largely ignored. An editorial in the Asahi Shinbun newspaper urged Japanese to face their history. "Whether you like it or not, we must face history this year," it said.

Many of the dozens of veterans attending Saturday's commemoration in the northern Taiwan city of Hsinchu fought in War World II under Gen. Chiang Kai-shek, who ruled China in the 1920s.

Four years after China's victory over Japan, Chiang's Nationalist troops lost in a civil war to Mao Zedong's communist forces, and many fled to the island now known as Taiwan.

"For four years, Chinese soldiers fought the invading Japanese troops on their own" before the United States sent troops to the war and eventually beat back the Japanese, said Ma Ying-jeou, the presidential candidate of the Nationalist Party, which is now Taiwan's main opposition.

"We salute to the soldiers," Ma said at the veterans' gathering. "Because of their high spirits, rural China was able to defeat the industrialized Japan."

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