THE HISTORIAN AND THE CURATION OF THE PAST: YUKI TANAKA BETWEEN MEMORY, RESPONSIBILITY, AND PUBLIC HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a critical analysis of the professional trajectory of Japanese historian Yuki Tanaka, examining the ways in which his work can be understood as a practice of historical curation. A scholar of Japanese war crimes, violence against civilian populations, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and disputes over historical responsibility, Tanaka has developed a career marked by the circulation of his work across different spaces of production and appropriation of the past. His books and academic articles coexist, along this trajectory, with lectures aimed at non-university audiences, participation in documentary films, debates on museum exhibitions, editorial activities, peace movements, and initiatives concerned with accountability for war crimes. To understand this activity, the article draws on the notion of historical curation developed by Valdei Lopes de Araújo (2017), according to which a fundamental function of the historian in the present is to mediate socially distributed experiences of the past by promoting their selection, organization, contextualization, and re-presentation. From this perspective, Tanaka's trajectory makes it possible to observe curation as a practice of mediation that connects documents, testimonies, memories, languages, and diverse publics. The article argues that this activity broadens the possibilities for experiencing and understanding the past beyond strictly university circuits, while also incorporating the university as one of the spaces of this circulation. The analysis further highlights the open, selective, and contested character of curation: the historian's choices establish relations among experiences, displace consolidated frameworks, and create new possibilities for public engagement with pasts marked by violence, memory, and responsibility.

Keywords: Yuki Tanaka; Historical curation; Public History; Historian's craft; Historical responsibility.

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Introduction

Toshiyuki Tanaka, known internationally as Yuki Tanaka, was born in 1949 in Matsuoka, now part of the city of Eiheiji, Fukui Prefecture. His initial training was in Economics, before his interests progressively shifted toward political economy, comparative economic history, and Japanese imperialism. In 1976, he left Japan for England; he later settled in Australia, where he completed his PhD at the University of Western Australia and spent nearly two decades teaching and conducting research at Australian universities. Tanaka himself notes that, after leaving Japan, he began using the name Yuki in his life and in his English-language publications.[1]

His years in Australia progressively reshaped his research subjects. Contact with former prisoners of war, initially connected to reading and translating Japanese documentation, brought Tanaka closer to experiences of violence that remained present in campaigns for recognition and reparations. From the 1980s onward, the Australian War Memorial and the national archives became recurring research sites; later, trips to the National Archives of the United States broadened his documentary field. The historian began working on the treatment of prisoners, death marches, massacres, cannibalism, medical experiments, and other forms of violence perpetrated by Japanese imperial forces.

This agenda received its first systematic treatment in *Shirarezaru Sensō Hanzai: Nihon-gun wa Ōsutoraria-jin ni Nani o Shita ka*, published in Japan in 1993, and reached an international readership with *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II* (Tanaka, 1996; 2018). Research on military sexual violence, already present in these early works, later became a distinct line of inquiry, culminating in *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II and the US Occupation* (Tanaka, 2002). This thematic shift was accompanied by a growing concern with structures of responsibility and the institutional mechanisms capable of producing atrocities, avoiding a reduction of violence to an exclusively cultural explanation of Japanese behavior.

The research also began to circulate through formats other than the monograph. Manuscripts on Sandakan were used in the production of *Return to Sandakan* (1995), and other audiovisual projects began to draw on documents, arguments, and interlocutors connected to Tanaka. This movement is important because it shows that his public activity

[1] On this point, see Yuki Tanaka's personal website, Profile section. Available at: <https://yjtanaka.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

did not emerge only at the end of an academic career: it developed gradually, although it became much more intense and regular in the second half of the 1990s and, above all, after his move to Hiroshima.

After nearly twenty years in Australia, Tanaka returned to Japan in 2000 and, in April 2002, took up a research position at the Hiroshima Peace Institute, affiliated with Hiroshima City University, where he remained until his retirement in 2015. The move to Hiroshima broadened the range of problems addressed in his work. Japanese crimes remained central, but they began to be related to the history of the bombing of civilian populations, atomic memory, pacifism, and disputes over American responsibility for Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In 2008[2], his international circulation also included periods at the University of London and the University of Melbourne; after retiring, he returned to Melbourne, describing himself as a "freelance historian and political critic".[3]

At the Hiroshima Peace Institute, specialized research coexisted with public lectures, symposia, peace movements, and debates on museum exhibitions. This new institutional position brought Tanaka closer to *hibakusha*, anti-nuclear organizations, and a city whose public identity was strongly tied to the experience of August 6, 1945. At the same time, his earlier work on Japanese war crimes prevented this memory from being treated solely as a narrative of national innocence. The tension between victimization and responsibility would come to organize an important part of his work in the years that followed.

In *Entwined Atrocities* (2023), Tanaka brought together in a particularly systematic way issues that had run through his work: Japanese crimes, American incendiary and atomic bombings, Hirohito's responsibility, public memory, and postwar democracy. The book reveals a trajectory whose eventual form was produced by changes of country, institution, archive, and public, rather than by a program conceived in advance. This observation is important in order to avoid a teleological biography in which all earlier movements would appear as inevitable preparation for an already fully formed intellectual position.

[2] On this point, see Yuki Tanaka's personal website, Profile section. Available at: <https://yjtanaka.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

[3] Original text: "I now work as a freelance historian and political critic." On this point, see Yuki Tanaka's personal website, Profile section. Available at: <https://yjtanaka.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

This trajectory makes Michel de Certeau's notion of the historiographical operation especially productive. By defining the writing of history through the combination of social location, research practices, and writing, Certeau (2008, p. 67) reminds us that historiographical production cannot be separated from the institutions, networks, professional positions, and documentary possibilities that make it possible. In Tanaka's case, Australia brought the researcher closer to former prisoners and military archives; Hiroshima placed atomic memory and aerial violence back at the center of his questions; international circulation broadened the scales of comparison. Understanding where Tanaka speaks from, the materials with which he works, and the interlocutors he addresses therefore provides the foundation for analyzing, in the pages that follow, how his practice participates in the public mediation of experiences of the past.

From this trajectory, Tanaka's career will be used as a case through which to test the analytical productivity of the notion of historical curation. The aim is to observe how operations of selection, relation, and re-presentation take place in concrete situations of public circulation of the past, and what tensions emerge when historiographical authority comes to be negotiated with witnesses, institutions, filmmakers, movements, and different publics. The case thus makes it possible to examine not only the possibilities of curation, but also its limits, choices, and criteria.

Historical curation as an analytical framework: selecting, relating, re-presenting

If the preceding trajectory showed how Tanaka's objects and problems were produced through contact with archives, institutions, and social demands, the next question is what the historian does upon entering a field in which the past is already circulating. Former prisoners, *hibakusha*, survivors of military sexual slavery, feminist movements, museums, media outlets, and pacifist organizations possessed their own memories, claims, and forms of representation before the researcher's intervention. Historiographical activity therefore involves working critically with experiences that do not begin at the university.

It is in this sense that Valdei Lopes de Araújo proposes thinking of the historian as the curator of a socially distributed historical experience. For Araújo (2017, p. 192), the historiographical field can constitute itself as a "space for welcoming and critically bringing together

the plurality of histories"[4]. Later, he characterizes curation through the "promotion, selection, editing, and re-presentation of socially distributed and shared histories" (Araújo, 2017, p. 213-214)[5]. The formulation shifts the image of the historian from the exclusive radiating center of knowledge toward a mediating position within an environment already occupied by different producers of the past.

The verbs used by Araújo help make the category operational. To promote means creating conditions of visibility; to select involves establishing relevance among countless possible traces and narratives; to edit corresponds to organizing, contextualizing, and constructing relations; to re-present implies offering new conditions of encounter between these experiences and different publics. These operations are neither rigid stages nor producers of neutrality. Every selection establishes hierarchies, and every re-presentation transforms, at least partially, what it places into circulation.

For the purposes of this analysis, these operations will be grouped into three axes. Editing will be observed above all as the production of relations – that is, as the organization and bringing together of experiences, documents, and frameworks that were previously separate – while promotion will be treated as a dimension transversal to the other operations, since selecting, relating, and re-presenting also produce new conditions of public visibility.

In Tanaka's case, selection appears when a demand from former prisoners comes to organize a research agenda; editing becomes visible when Japanese crimes, Allied bombings, and Hiroshima are placed within the same history of responsibility; re-presentation appears when these arguments move across books, television, museums, lectures, and tribunals. Curation thus provides an analytical framework for understanding the continuity between the constitution of the object and public circulation, avoiding the treatment of dissemination and research as completely separate activities.

This circulation also makes it possible to recover the public responsibility of the intellectual formulated by Said (2005). Specialization provides tools, but intellectual intervention gains density when those tools are used to make politically uncomfortable questions discussable before broader publics. In Tanaka, this is manifested both in his criticism of the crimes of the Japanese state and in his willingness to question the bombings carried out by the Allies, including when these issues unsettle

[4] Original text: "espaço de acolhimento e convergência crítica da pluralidade de histórias".
[5] Original text: "promoção, seleção, edição e reapresentação de histórias socialmente distribuídas e compartilhadas".

the expectations of publics or movements with which he maintains close ties.

At the same time, this intervention is never individual in an absolute sense. The networks highlighted by Angela de Castro Gomes (1996) help us see universities, journals, publishers, research centers, and movements as concrete conditions of production and circulation. When the historian enters legal arenas, in turn, historiographical authority encounters other rules of evidence and attribution, a process Dumoulin (2017) follows in the passage from the chair to the courtroom. Curation must therefore be understood as a situated and relational practice.

It is precisely for this reason that Michael Frisch's (1990) notion of shared authority broadens Araújo's framework. In situations of public history, the historian does not grant a voice that did not previously exist: witnesses, communities, filmmakers, and publics already participate in the production of meaning. Historiographical expertise remains specific, but its authority must be negotiated with other forms of knowledge and experience. In a documentary, for example, the historian's documentation encounters choices of script and editing; in a tribunal, it encounters legal categories; in a social movement, it encounters political demands and previously organized memories.

From this combination, Tanaka's trajectory will be read through three recurring operations – selecting, relating, and re-presenting – always accompanied by two additional questions: with whom is authority negotiated, and what criteria delimit mediation? The latter question is indispensable because the social distribution of history does not make all narratives equivalent. Openness to plurality remains tied to evidence, documentary criticism, and responsibility for the public effects of the relations produced.

Selecting: from the demands of former prisoners to the construction of an agenda

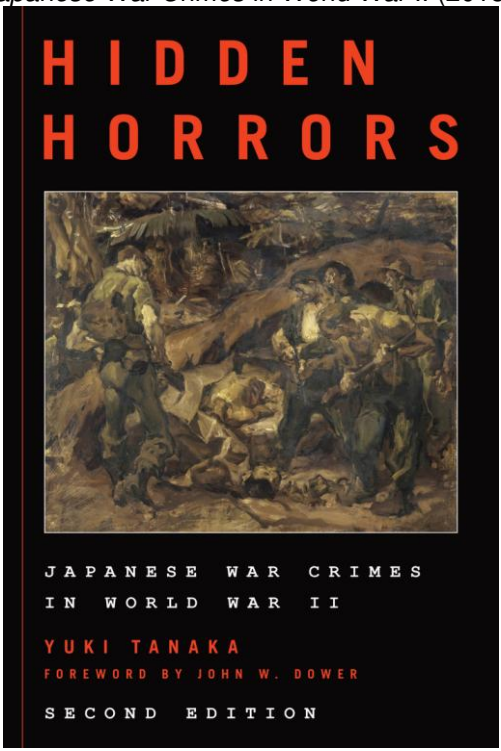
The first major selection in Tanaka's agenda emerged from the encounter between academic expertise and social demand. In the late 1970s and throughout the following years, former Australian prisoners of war mobilized around recognition and compensation sought assistance in understanding Japanese documentation. The former prisoners' experience already existed as memory and claim; Tanaka could add his ability to read Japanese, translate, research, and contextualize. The movement is important because external demand alters the academic agenda, while knowledge produced at the university returns to the public sphere for practical purposes.

This relationship approaches what Hayden White calls the *practical past*: the past mobilized when individuals and groups need to judge, decide, and act in the present (White, 2018). In the Australian case, wartime documents could participate in claims for recognition and responsibility. Practical purpose, however, did not replace disciplinary work; it increased the need to locate, criticize, and relate evidence. Mediation is formed precisely in this circuit between social need and historiographical expertise.

Throughout the 1980s, Tanaka began working systematically with materials from the Australian War Memorial and the national archives. His research was already reaching the press before the publication of his first major monograph: in August 1992, international news agencies reported documents he had located concerning episodes of cannibalism committed by Japanese soldiers in New Guinea. The episode reveals a pattern that would recur later: the university archive provides elements for a public debate about aspects of the war that had remained insufficiently addressed.[6]

[6] On the public circulation of Tanaka's research on cannibalism in Japanese units, see United Press International, 10 Aug. 1992. Available at: <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1992/08/10/Documents-claim-cannibalism-by-Japanese-World-War-II-soldiers/2568713419200/>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

Figure 1 – Cover of the second edition of *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II* (2018).



Source: Tanaka (2018).

In 1993, Tanaka published *Shirarezaru Sensō Hanzai: Nihon-gun wa Ōsutoraria-jin ni Nani o Shita ka*. The organization of the volume already revealed the expansion of his agenda: Sandakan and the Geneva Convention, death marches and responsibility, the massacre of nurses and sexual violence, as well as cannibalism and documentation produced by Australian forces. The English edition, *Hidden Horrors*[7] (1996), brought this body of work to international readers and broadened the question from individual acts to the institutional, military, and psychological mechanisms that make brutalization possible.

The second edition of *Hidden Horrors*, published in 2018, is particularly important because it demonstrates that selection remained

[7] On the 1993 Japanese edition, its structure, and bibliographic data, see the Shōwakan digital catalog. Available at: <https://search.showakan.go.jp/search/book/detail.php?material_cord=000020558>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

open to revision. Tanaka incorporated research conducted over the previous two decades, added a chapter on Nauru, and reconsidered the excessive emphasis his earlier interpretation had placed on *bushidō*. Curation, in this case, also involves revising the assemblage itself: new documents and new questions alter what the historian considers relevant and the explanatory relations offered to the reader.

Sandakan makes the passage between research and public circulation especially visible. Tanaka recalls that the name of the camp began to gain a greater presence in Australia when interviews with survivors were recorded by the ABC in the early 1980s: "it was only in the early 1980s [...] that the name 'Sandakan' began to be heard" (Tanaka, 2018, p. 14). His work combined survivor testimonies, court records, military documentation, and interviews with former soldiers and guards. Documentary selection thus brought together memories produced by subjects situated in radically different positions within the violence.[8]

In 1995, this research fed into *Return to Sandakan*, a Film Australia production broadcast by the ABC. Tanaka lists the film among those in which he was closely involved in a consulting and/or organizational capacity; the principal credits identify Raymond Quint as producer and director. The documentary brought to a television audience a history of forced labor, death marches, and the murder of prisoners that had long remained difficult to narrate publicly. The historian's participation did not replace the authority of survivors or filmmakers: it placed research and documentation within a collective assemblage.[9]

Sexual violence opened another branch of inquiry. *Rape and War: The Japanese Experience* (1995) and, above all, *Japan's Comfort Women* (2002) placed Tanaka within a field already constructed by survivors, activists, journalists, and researchers. His work expanded both the documentation and the geographical scale of the problem, especially toward Southeast Asia and the Pacific. When he later addressed the subject, Tanaka explicitly linked research and public responsibility, arguing that Japanese society should acknowledge the crimes and demand that the government compensate survivors (Tanaka, 2020).

[8] Original text: "It was only in the early 1980s – when interviews were recorded with the survivors for an ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) radio program – that the name 'Sandakan' began to be heard." (Tanaka, 2018, p. 14).

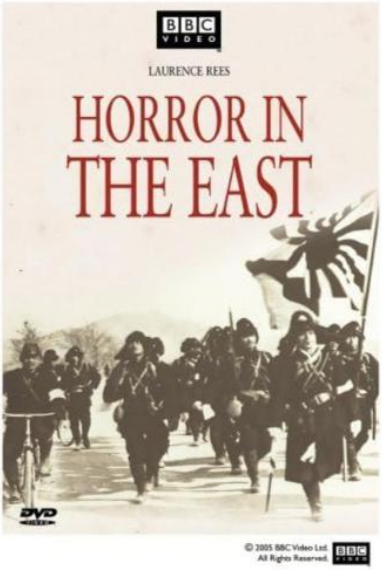
[9] On Tanaka's participation, see the historian's personal website, TV Documentary Films section. Available at: <https://yjtanaka.blogspot.com/p/tv.html>. For production credits, see the Australian Centre for the Moving Image. Available at: <https://www.acmi.net.au/works/85223--return-to-sandakan/>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

The connection between investigation and circulation became materially evident during the preparation of the documentary *Asian Comfort Women*. In the acknowledgments to *Japan's Comfort Women*, Tanaka notes that NHK funded research trips to the National Archives of the United States and that this access substantially changed the book that would be published in 2002. Television, therefore, does not appear merely as a later stage of dissemination; it participates in the very conditions of research. The circuit between academia and media works in both directions.

Tanaka's personal website lists sixteen audiovisual productions between 1989 and 2020, including works on nuclear testing in Australia, the occupation of Japan, Sandakan, sexual slavery, war crimes, and nuclear memory. Taken together, they reveal an agenda that expands through successive returns: a demand leads to the archive; the archive produces books; books feed documentaries; audiovisual projects generate resources and new sources; themes reappear before other publics. Along this trajectory, selecting means not only choosing a subject, but redistributing visibility and producing conditions for uncomfortable experiences to remain historically available.[10]

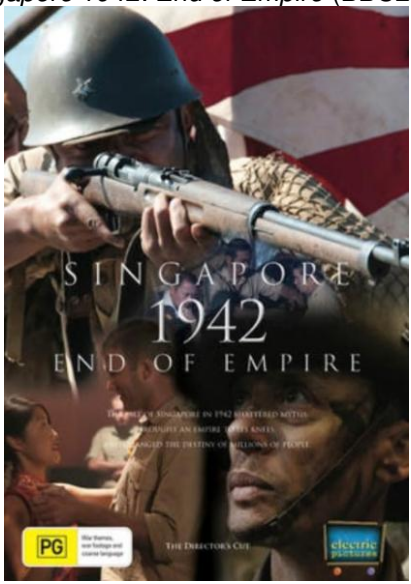
[10] On this point, see Yuki Tanaka's personal website, TV Documentary Films section. Available at: <https://yjtanaka.blogspot.com/p/tv.html>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

Figure 2 – *Horror in the East* (BBC, 2000).



Source: IMDb. Available at: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0309685/ Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

Figure 3 – *Singapore 1942: End of Empire* (BBC2, 2012).



Source: IMDb. Available at: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2182123/ Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

Among the productions in this audiovisual trajectory are *Horror in the East* (BBC, 2000) and *Singapore 1942: End of Empire* (BBC2, 2012). The first, a two-part documentary series written and produced by Laurence Rees and directed by Rees, Martina Balazova, and Fumio Kanda, constitutes a particularly clear case of Tanaka's research moving into another language and medium. *Hidden Horrors* provided extensive historical background material for the production, and Tanaka served as historical consultant to the project alongside Akira Iriye. The investigation developed over the preceding years into Japanese war crimes, the treatment of prisoners, violence against civilians, and institutional structures of brutalization thus became part of a television narrative organized through interviews, archival images, and decisions specific to documentary language. *Singapore 1942: End of Empire*, produced by Electric Pictures, was written and directed by Don Featherstone and structured in two episodes that combine testimonies from survivors and historians, period audiovisual documentation, and dramatized reconstructions to narrate the fall of Singapore from British, Australian, Japanese, and various local perspectives. Tanaka also includes this production among the documentaries in which he was closely involved in a consulting and/or organizational capacity, although he does not publicly specify a more precise technical credit. In both cases, therefore, his contribution should not be confused with cinematic authorship: his research provides documents, problems, frameworks, and specialized knowledge that are subsequently negotiated with screenwriters, directors, producers, witnesses, and archives, making especially visible what the notion of curation allows us to observe – the transformation of historiographical knowledge when it is selected, edited, and re-presented for much broader publics.[11]

Editing and relating: between Japanese crimes, Hiroshima, and the history of bombing

The move to Hiroshima produced a turn that could superficially be interpreted as a shift from criticism of Japanese crimes to the victimization of Japan. The problem is more complex. The memory

[11] Regarding Horror in the East, Tanaka notes that Hidden Horrors provided extensive historical background material for the production and that he served as a consultant to the project alongside Akira Iriye. Available at: https://yjtanaka.blogspot.com/p/publication.html?m=1. Regarding Singapore 1942: End of Empire, Tanaka includes the production among those in which he was closely involved in a consulting and/or organizational capacity. Available at: https://yjtanaka.blogspot.com/p/tv.html. For the production credits, see Electric Pictures. Available at: https://electricpictures.com.au/portfolio-items/singapore-1942-end-of-empire/. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

of Hiroshima could sustain both a radical critique of the destruction of civilians and a national narrative capable of minimizing imperial responsibility. Japanese denialism repeatedly exploited this asymmetry, converting real victimization into a totalizing identity. Valim, Avelar, and Bevernage (2021) show how denialism and ideological revisionism often seek to appropriate the legitimate language of historiographical revision; in the Japanese case, the dispute turns precisely on the selection of what to remember and what to omit.

This dispute also materializes in controversies over textbooks, exhibitions, the public language of war, and national frameworks of the Asia-Pacific War, in which the selection of victims and responsibilities is itself part of the struggle over the meaning of the past (Neto, 2021).

Historical revision, however, is part of the ordinary functioning of the discipline. Arthur Lima de Ávila (2021) distinguishes historiographical pluralism from "anything goes"[12]: different perspectives may dispute interpretations, but they remain subject to evidence, argumentative coherence, and public criticism. Thus, to relativize historically can be understood as making events relational – placing them back within their scales, contexts, and differences – rather than declaring all versions equivalent. Ginzburg's (2002) insistence on evidence and Hobsbawm's (1993) sense of responsibility in the face of political-ideological abuses of history reinforce this limit. Comparison is necessary; falsifying, deliberately omitting, or protecting a predetermined conclusion is another operation altogether.

This distinction is especially important because criticism of Allied bombing can be appropriated by nationalist narratives as moral compensation for Japanese crimes. The historiographical operation must work in the opposite direction: one act of violence does not become lesser because another existed. The atomic bomb does not absolve Nanjing; Nanjing does not legitimize the atomic bomb. Military sexual slavery does not turn the Japanese civilian population into an acceptable target, just as Hiroshima's status as victim does not transform the imperial state into an innocent victim of the war it helped produce.

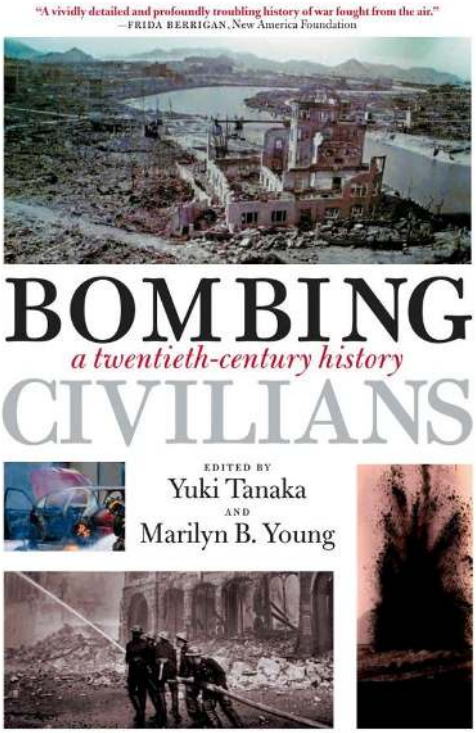
This point organizes Tanaka's editing of Hiroshima. In *Crime and Responsibility* (2006), he criticizes a memorial framework that effectively begins the war in 1941 and, in doing so, makes it more difficult to recognize aggression against China and other Japanese responsibilities. At the same time, he questions language that presents the bomb as though it had simply "fallen" on Hiroshima, relegating American agency to the background. The assemblage works in both directions: including

12 Original text: "vale tudo".

Japanese crimes prevents Hiroshima from producing absolute national innocence; naming the American decision prevents criticism of Japanese imperialism from turning civilians into morally acceptable targets.

The critique also reaches the city's own memorial apparatuses. Tanaka recognizes the anti-nuclear force of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, but observes that its almost exclusive concentration on local experience makes it difficult to perceive aspects shared by victims of bombing, nuclear tests, and other forms of wartime violence (Tanaka, 2006, p. 4). The problem, therefore, is not remembering Hiroshima intensely, but asking with which experiences that memory is placed in relation and which responsibilities become visible or invisible within the assemblage.

Figure 4 – Cover of *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth-Century History* (2009).



Source: Tanaka; Young (2009).

In this way, victim and perpetrator cease to constitute national essences. A Japanese civilian killed by bombing is a victim of that attack; the imperial state and its forces may be perpetrators in Nanjing, in military sexual slavery, or in other crimes. The defeat of an aggressive regime, in turn, does not grant moral immunity to the actions of the victors. Traverso (2018) helps formulate this balance by showing that historical singularity does not require incomparability: events remain specific precisely when comparison makes explicit where they converge and where they differ.

Figure 5 – Opening page of the report of the symposium *Reflections of the Enola Gay*, held in Hiroshima on 31 July 2004.



報告書の発刊にあたって

広島平和研究所長　福井　治弘

広島平和研究所は、本年７月３１日、広島国際会議場において、「エノラ・ゲイの閃光– 戦争と破壊の象徴：１９４５～２００４」と題する国際シンポジウムを開催いたしました。

広島・長崎両市への原子爆弾投下は、無差別爆撃と大量殺りくという２種類の「人道に対する罪」の典型であり、現代の戦争や民族紛争、さらには９・１１のようなテロ行為に共通する犯罪です。その意味で、広島市民の頭上に原子爆弾を投下した爆撃機「エノラ・ゲイ」は、第一次世界大戦以来、これまで連綿として続いてきた無差別爆撃と大量殺りくの長い歴史を最も鮮明な形で象徴するものと言えます。このたびのシンポジウムでは、米国で２００３年１２月から永久展示が始まったこの「エノラ・ゲイ」が、象徴としてわれわれに語りかけるものは何かについて、さまざまな観点から検討することをねらいとして開催いたしました。

パネリストには、当研究所の田中教授のほか、トニー・コーディー氏（オーストラリア・メルボルン大学教授）、ローレンス・ウィットナー氏（米国ニューヨーク州立大学教授）、ローラ・ハイン氏（米国ノースウェスタン大学教授）、川本隆史氏（東京大学大学院教授）の４名の研究者をお迎えしました。まず前半で各パネリストから「エノラ・ゲイ」の展示や原爆投下をめぐる興味深い報告や提言をいただき、続く後半ではパネリストと来場者との間で質疑応答や意見交換が行われるなど、大変意義深く、実り多いシンポジウムとすることができました。

このシンポジウムの内容を取りまとめました本報告書が、無差別爆撃のもつ非人間性への認識を新たにし、そのうえで核兵器の廃絶と世界平和の現実を願う広島のメッセージの普遍化に少しでもお役に立つことができれば幸いです。

平成 16 年 10 月

主催者あいさつ

広島平和研究所長　福井　治弘

広島平和研究所長の福井でございます。本日は台風の予報が出ております中、このように多くの皆さんに出席していただきまして、心から感謝いたします。今年のテーマは、「エノラ・ゲイ」でございます。昨年は「空からの恐怖– ヒロシマから見る無差別爆撃」、その前の年が「原爆投下を巡る記憶と和解」というテーマでやりましたので、偶然３部作のようになりましたが、今回もまたヒロシマをテーマにしてやることにいたしました。われわれ研究者にとって当然のことでありますが、ヒロシマというのはそれだけ重要だということです。

本日のお話は、ご承知のようにワシントンの航空宇宙博物館に常設永久展示されることになった「エノラ・ゲイ」についてです。その象徴的な意味はもちろん、アメリカの多くの人々にとっても、マスメディアにとっても、退役軍人会にとっても、最新技術の象徴ということですが、それについて若干異論があります。われわれにとっては、それは昨年のテーマのとおり、空からの恐怖の象徴であります。それは戦争と破壊の象徴でもあるということで、その観点から議論がなされると思います。

ただ、われわれはアメリカの多くの人々あるいは政府が考えているようなことを、単に第三者的な立場から非難するわけではありません。「他山の石」という言い方がありますように、自分たちもそれを手本にしてと言いますか、それを見て、われわれの行いも正していきたいと思うのです。

Source: Hiroshima Peace Institute (2004).

The new scale appeared publicly in the Hiroshima Peace Institute's 2003 public lecture series, in which Tanaka addressed the history of indiscriminate bombing in Europe, in the Asia-Pacific region, and then in contemporary wars from Vietnam to Iraq. The sequence is already a form of editing: Hiroshima ceases to function as an isolated event and comes to occupy a history of the transformation of civilians into military targets.[13]

This architecture took editorial form in *Bombing Civilians: A Twentieth-Century History*, edited with Marilyn B. Young. In the introduction, Tanaka writes that "For the bomber crews, the people on the ground are entirely abstract; they are targets. By contrast, the experience of their victims is of the most terrible concrete reality" (Tanaka, 2009a, p. 1). The common problem is the transformation of civilians into targets; differences of technology, scale, objective, and context remain fundamental so that comparison does not become equivalence.[14]

The debate over the *Enola Gay* makes editing literally museological. In 2003, writing on behalf of the Hiroshima Alliance for Nuclear Weapons Abolition, Tanaka argued that displaying the aircraft without the history of indiscriminate bombing would contribute to normalizing crimes against humanity (Tanaka, 2003). The following year, he moderated the symposium *Reflections of the Enola Gay: Symbolic Representations of War and Destruction, 1945-2004* and closed the meeting by arguing that the American controversy offered suggestions for rethinking Japanese modes of exhibition as well. Criticism of the other thus returned as a demand to revise Hiroshima's own memory.[15]

In this movement, Tanaka upholds an ethical criterion that cuts across political differences: the indiscriminate killing of civilians must be rejected regardless of motive or perpetrator. The statement does not erase the differences among fascism, imperialism, democracy, or resistance; it requires only that no political identity function as moral

[13] On this point, see the Hiroshima Peace Institute website, Public Lecture Series 2003. Available at: <https://www.peace.hiroshima-cu.ac.jp/public_lecture/pls2003/>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

[14] Original text: "For the bomber crews, the people on the ground are entirely abstract; they are targets. By contrast, the experience of their victims is of the most terrible concrete reality." (Tanaka, 2009a, p. 1).

[15] On this point, see the Hiroshima Peace Institute website, Reflections of the Enola Gay: Symbolic Representations of War and Destruction, 1945-2004. Available at: <https://www.peace.hiroshima-cu.ac.jp/symposium/20040731/>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

carte blanche. Historiography continues to explain contexts and asymmetries, but rejects the idea that the justice of a cause automatically legitimizes every means used in its name.

The trajectory culminates in *Entwined Atrocities* (2023), which places Japanese atrocities, American incendiary and atomic bombings, Hirohito's responsibility, and postwar rearrangements within the same frame. The very structure of the book speaks of the intertwined responsibilities of perpetrators and victims. The operation does not produce an accounting in which Nanjing diminishes Hiroshima or Hiroshima absolves Nanjing. Its criterion is different: crimes remain crimes regardless of the nationality and ideology of those who commit them. Relating, in this sense, broadens the field of responsibility without softening political differences or turning distinct experiences into identical events.

Re-presenting and negotiating authority: mediation beyond the university

Re-presentation adds to curation a question about authority: what happens when research changes medium, institution, and public? In Tanaka's trajectory, books and articles come to coexist with documentaries, lectures, electronic journals, pacifist movements, and people's tribunals. In each space, other agents participate in the choices. It is at this point that Frisch (1990) becomes decisive: public authority is not simply ceded by the historian; it is already distributed among researchers, witnesses, filmmakers, institutions, and audiences.

Documentaries show this negotiation concretely. When Tanaka works as a consultant, his documentary expertise becomes part of decisions about script, image, editing, testimony, and duration that also belong to producers and directors. A piece of information central to a monograph may occupy only seconds on television; a testimony may reorganize the entire narrative structure; an aesthetic choice may reach publics unlikely to read a specialized study. Historiographical authority remains, but it begins to operate in combination with other forms of expertise.

The same occurs with *Japan Focus*, later *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*. The journal's records identify Tanaka in coordinating roles within an international team, while Mark Selden appears as founding editor. Editorial mediation is collective: selecting texts, promoting translations, organizing debates, and building an international audience

require authority distributed through networks. This experience is especially important because the journal articulated academic production, public intervention, and transnational circulation in open access.[16]

The Hiroshima Peace Institute's public lectures produced another form of negotiation. The series were directed toward civil society, and in them Tanaka addressed both the history of bombing and Mizuno Hironori and *Godzilla*, bringing war, culture, and pacifism into relation. Before citizens of Hiroshima, academic authority had to coexist with subjects who possessed their own relationships to atomic memory. The lecture thus ceases to be the simple transmission of ready-made knowledge and becomes a space of confrontation between historiographical interpretation and social experience.[17]

The institute's own programming favored this movement between research and public debate. The historian appeared as lecturer, moderator, and organizer of situations in which specialists, testimonies, and audience questions could interfere with the way a problem was presented. The *Enola Gay* symposium[18], for example, did not produce a single authorized voice: it placed distinct perspectives in confrontation and required Tanaka, in his final synthesis, to negotiate what could be learned from the controversy for local memory.

This passage becomes more explicit in his work with the Hiroshima Alliance for Nuclear Weapons Abolition. The organization articulated anti-nuclear campaigns and public initiatives; records from 2007 identify Tanaka as a member of its steering committee and a participant in the proposal for a people's tribunal on the bombings. Participation in a movement did not eliminate critical autonomy. Tanaka also questioned the limits of Hiroshima's own pacifism when it avoided simultaneously discussing American responsibility and Japanese crimes. Negotiated authority therefore includes disagreement within the networks to which the intellectual belongs.[19]

[16] On this point, see The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus website. Available at: <https://apjjf.org/about>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.
[17] On this point, see the Hiroshima Peace Institute website, Public Lecture Series 2004. Available at: <https://www.peace.hiroshima-cu.ac.jp/public_lecture/pls2004/>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.
[18] On the institutional policy for public lectures, symposia, and the social dissemination of research, see the Hiroshima Peace Institute website. Available at: <https://www.peace.hiroshima-cu.ac.jp/institute-policies/>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.
[19] On this point, see the activity archive of the Hiroshima Alliance for Nuclear Weapons Abolition. Available at: <https://www.e-hanwa.org/event/2007/58>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

The *International Peoples' Tribunal on the Dropping of Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* represents the most intense form of this circulation. Organized between 2006 and 2007, the tribunal brought together documents, testimonies, historiographical arguments, and international law within a structure of accusation and judgment. Contemporary records of the initiative identify Tanaka as co-chair of the executive committee[20]; the final judgment was presented in July 2007[21]. As Dumoulin (2017) observes, the historian's entry into legal arenas changes his role, since events must be reorganized according to categories of evidence, responsibility, and attribution.

Figure 6 – *International Peoples' Tribunal on the Dropping of Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, Hiroshima, 15-16 July 2006. At right, Yuki Tanaka during the tribunal's proceedings.



Source: Photographs by Jun Hasegawa. Official website of the *International Peoples' Tribunal on the Dropping of Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki*, via Internet Archive (Wayback Machine). Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20061019065808/http://www.k3.dion.ne.jp/~a-bomb/index.htm. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

[20] On Tanaka's position as co-chair of the executive committee, see the record in Shimbun Akahata. Available at: https://www.jcp.or.jp/akahata/aik07/2007-07-18/2007071804_03_0.html. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

[21] On the judgment of the International Peoples' Tribunal on the Dropping of Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, see: INTERNATIONAL PEOPLES' TRIBUNAL ON THE DROPPING OF ATOMIC BOMBS ON HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI. Judgement. 16 jul. 2007. Available at: https://www.concernedhistorians.org/content_files/file/LE/528.pdf. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

The selection of the accused itself demonstrates this translation. In a lecture at the University of Chicago, Tanaka explained that the tribunal chose "the fifteen people most responsible," while acknowledging that many other agents participated in the decision-making process (Tanaka, 2009c). Historical complexity was converted into a public form of accountability, negotiated with jurists, activists, and survivors. The tribunal's lack of coercive power made it even more evident that its authority depended on the quality of the evidence, the argumentation, and its capacity to produce public recognition.[22]

Figure 7 – Yuki Tanaka during the lecture *Crime and Responsibility: War, Indiscriminate Bombing, and Mass Killing*, University of Chicago, 3 Feb. 2009.



Source: University of Chicago, *Tetsuo Najita Distinguished Lecture*. Available at: https://chiasmos.uchicago.edu/2008-2009/ceas-090203-tanaka.shtml Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

[22] On the lecture and its public circulation, see University of Chicago, Center for East Asian Studies. Available at: <https://ceas.uchicago.edu/yuki-tanaka-atomic-bomb-lecture-2009>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

The negotiation also produced institutional conflicts. The reconciliation policy of the city of Hiroshima did not always coincide with the accountability strategy defended by the tribunal's organizers, and public records show disagreements over municipal support for the initiative. This episode is important because shared authority does not mean harmonious consensus. City government, movements, survivors, jurists, and historians may dispute what atomic memory should do in the present and which forms of responsibility should be publicly formulated.[23]

The circuit, therefore, is not linear. Public demands can generate research problems; results return to documentaries and movements; experiences of activism transform new questions; and those questions return to universities and publications. Historical curation reveals itself precisely in this crossing. Tanaka does not abandon the university, but uses the competencies formed within it in arenas where he no longer speaks alone. To re-present means making the past circulate across languages and media; to negotiate authority means accepting that each passage transforms the form, reach, and also the limits of historiographical intervention.

Conclusion

Yuki Tanaka's trajectory makes it possible to understand historical curation less as a professional identity attributable to particular historians than as a set of operations performed when knowledge about the past circulates among different subjects, institutions, languages, and publics. The case analyzed here has shown that selecting, relating, and re-presenting are not stages that follow a research project already completed. These operations run through the very constitution of historical problems: social demands lead to archives; documents reorganize questions; academic research feeds audiovisual productions; testimonies interfere in narrative construction; public controversies generate new problems; and results return to the university transformed by this circulation. In this sense, the notion of curation proposed by Araújo (2017) makes visible a dimension of the historian's craft that cannot be reduced either to disciplinary research understood in isolation or to the conventional idea of scholarly dissemination.

[23] On the disagreements between the tribunal committee and Hiroshima municipal policy, see Hiroshima Peace Media Center. Available at: <https://www.hiroshimapeacemedia.jp/?p=23926>. Accessed: 8 Sept. 2026.

Tanaka's trajectory also showed that this capacity for mediation is historically constructed. His approach to Japanese war crimes did not result from an intellectual program defined at the outset of his career, but from contingent encounters with former Australian prisoners, specific linguistic competencies, access to particular archives, and successive institutional movements. His years in Australia, his return to Japan, his position at the Hiroshima Peace Institute, and his circulation through academic and public networks created different conditions for formulating his research objects. The intensification of his public activity in the 1990s and 2000s occurred when books, documentaries, editorial projects, peace movements, and debates over atomic memory encountered a researcher already equipped with a documentary repertoire and comparative experience. Curation, therefore, appears not as a preexisting personal attribute, but as a competence produced through the relationship among training, circumstance, infrastructure, and professional experience.

This observation prevents the case from being transformed into an exemplary or heroic narrative. Tanaka did not produce the memories of Australian prisoners, did not inaugurate the denunciations of military sexual slavery, did not create the experience of the *hibakusha*, and did not single-handedly control documentaries, journals, symposia, movements, or people's tribunals. The experiences with which he worked were already distributed among survivors, relatives, activists, journalists, filmmakers, archives, institutions, and communities of memory. His intervention added procedures specific to historiography – documentary research, criticism, contextualization, comparison, and the establishment of relations – without turning these other subjects into mere suppliers of raw material. It is precisely at this point that historical curation encounters the shared authority discussed by Frisch (1990): specialized expertise remains relevant, but it begins to operate in spaces where the historian holds no monopoly over either experience or its meanings.

The material conditions of this circulation are equally important. Archives, universities, publishers, broadcasters, funding, journals, and political organizations did not function merely as external settings for a body of work conceived autonomously. At different moments, they participated in the very possibilities of research, documentary access, and re-presentation. The funding of trips to the National Archives in the context of television production on the so-called *comfort women*, for example, shows how media and investigation could operate in a circuit, rather than simply in a sequence in which knowledge is first produced and only later disseminated. Recognizing these infrastructures

introduces a necessary reflexivity into the analysis: the historian's autonomy exists, but it is exercised within concrete networks and opportunities, unevenly distributed and capable of expanding, restricting, or redirecting what can be researched and publicly presented.

The most evident productivity of curation in Tanaka's case appears, however, in the operation of placing previously separate experiences in relation. His move to Hiroshima did not simply represent a change of object in which crimes committed by Japan were replaced by crimes committed against Japanese people. The movement was more complex: Nanjing, military sexual slavery, violence against prisoners, incendiary bombing, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki came to form a common field of inquiry into violence against civilians, political responsibility, and public forms of memory. This assemblage breaks with a comfortable moral distribution between permanently victimized nations and permanently perpetrating nations. A Japanese civilian struck by a bombing can be a victim without that turning Japanese imperialism into a historical victim; recognizing Japanese responsibility for atrocities in Asia does not make the indiscriminate destruction of civilian populations by the Allies legitimate. The relation diminishes none of these forms of violence: it makes it more difficult to use one to silence or justify the other.

It is at this point that the question of relativism acquires decisive importance. To relativize historically, in the sense used in this article, means establishing relations, reconstructing contexts, identifying scales, and recognizing differences. It does not mean dissolving criteria of truth or converting incompatible interpretations into equally legitimate versions. The historiographical pluralism discussed by Ávila (2021) remains subject to demonstration, source criticism, and argumentative coherence; likewise, the distinction formulated by Valim, Avelar, and Bevernage (2021) between historiographical revision and denialist manipulation prevents openness to dispute from being confused with indifference toward falsification. Curation broadens the pasts that can be placed in relation, but it does not eliminate the need to justify why particular relations are historically sustainable. Comparing Hiroshima with other bombings does not erase the specificity of the nuclear weapon; bringing victims' experiences into proximity does not make them equivalent; revising established interpretations does not authorize the deliberate omission of evidence.

This problem also reveals the limits of the category of curation itself. Selecting inevitably means leaving something out; relating can produce illuminating connections or fragile analogies; re-presenting changes the conditions through which an experience becomes intelligible to another public. Public circulation does not automatically correct

these difficulties. A documentary may simplify, a museum may silence, a political movement may establish its own priorities, and a people's tribunal may reorganize complex historical processes according to categories of accusation, evidence, and legal responsibility. The historian who participates in these spaces does not abandon professional responsibility because authority is shared. The opposite is more appropriate: the greater the number of subjects involved in the public production of the past, the greater the need to make explicit the criteria, sources, choices, and limits of the assemblage. Tanaka's trajectory is important precisely because it allows us to observe simultaneously the power and the vulnerability of these operations.

For this reason, the contribution of the case does not lie in presenting Yuki Tanaka as a model of historian to be reproduced. It lies in showing concretely what can happen when historiographical competencies are mobilized in environments where the past already has other owners, interpreters, and publics. Japanese documentation could return to the demands of former Australian prisoners; specialized research reached viewers through television; Hiroshima could be placed in relation to Tokyo, Chongqing, Nanjing, and other experiences of violence against civilians; museological controversies became historiographical problems; testimonies and documents were reorganized into a legal language; and debates produced in these spaces later returned to texts, books, and lectures. Historical curation thus becomes a way of understanding the historian as a participant in circuits of production and circulation of the past, rather than as their exclusive point of origin.

Finally, Tanaka's case makes it possible to reposition responsibility as an internal element of mediation itself. Making the past circulate is not merely a matter of increasing its visibility, but of constructing relations capable of expanding what different publics can recognize as historically significant. Some of these relations will necessarily be uncomfortable because they disrupt national, political, and memorial loyalties. The memory of Hiroshima does not need to be weakened for the crimes of Japanese imperialism to be acknowledged; condemning those crimes does not require silence about Allied bombing. Understanding this coexistence historically is not the same as excusing, compensating for, or balancing atrocities in a moral accounting. It means preventing political identities from deciding in advance which documents may be considered, which victims deserve to be heard, and which responsibilities may be investigated.

It is precisely here that historical curation reveals its critical dimension. The right to a plurality of experiences of the past depends on the possibility of bringing them into proximity without making them identical, subjecting them to criticism without confiscating them, and re-presenting them without concealing the choices involved in the process. Yuki Tanaka's trajectory shows that the historian can help expand these possibilities by putting disciplinary expertise into circulation without claiming exclusive ownership over the experiences encountered. The critical function of curation, therefore, does not lie in pacifying conflicting pasts, but in creating conditions for their differences, connections, and responsibilities to remain open to investigation and public confrontation – including when what emerges from this encounter unsettles the certainties of those who research, those who remember, and those who listen.

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