A Portrayal of Suffering Women at War in Zhang Yimou's The

Flowers of War

Yunita Sulaiman, Susanne A.H. Sitohang Fakultas Sastra Universitas Kristen Indonesia Yunita.Sulaiman93@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Analisa ini membahas potret penderitaan wanita pada masa perang serta perjuangan para wanita selama masa perang untuk tetap bertahan hidup sebagaimana direpresentasikan dalam sebuah karva sastra berupa film yang berjudul The Flowers of War. Film ini digarap oleh Zhang Yimou, William Kong, David Linde, Zhang Weiping, dan Brandt Andersen. Film ini juga didukung oleh sebuah rumah produksi yaitu EDKO Film, Beijing New Picture Film, and New Picture Company. Sutradara dalam film ini adalah Zhang Yimou dan diperankan oleh Christian Bale sebagai karakter pendeta palsu yang dikenal sebagai John, Ni Ni yang dianggap sebagai ketua dalam kelompok prostitusi dikenal sebagai Yu Mo dan Shu sebagai ketua dalam kelompok anak-anak kecil dalam film. Film ini bercerita tentang penggambaran keadaan wanita baik wanita dewasa ataupun anak kecil di Nanjing selama masa perang antara Jepang dengan Cina pada tahun 1937. Hasil dari analisa ini menunjukkan bahwa wanita sangat menderita pada masa perang dan wanita cenderung dijadikan sebagai pelampiasan nafsu oleh para penjajah dan/atau tentara yang menjajah daerah tersebut.

Keywords: women, war, Zhang Yimou, Nanjing Massacre, Nanjing Rape, The Flowers of War

INTRODUCTION

The Flowers of War, a film by Zhang Yimou, tells about two groups of women who try to survive during the time of the Nanjing massacre. The two groups are the prostitutes and the young girls. They try to survive in their own way during wartime. These women do not want to be an object of massacre or atrocity by Japanese militaries. In their effort to hide from the Japanese as the colonizer to control Nanjing, the women face many challenges, especially the crimes that Japanese militaries do during the early war against Chinese civilians in Nanjing such as rape, murder, and other abusive acts. The women still fight until their struggle ends with the prostitutes sacrificing their lives to save the young girl's life from the rape by the Japanese militaries.

The Flowers of War movie is very special for the present writer as the spectator because it brings a portrayal of women during wartime. It is a hard time for women to survive but this movie shows us the portrayal of how women are treated by the militaries in wartime. Another interesting point is Zhang Yimou, the director,

presents a main female character named Yu Mo, who works as a prostitute while most people would look down on prostitutes because they work to satisfy their sexual needs. This film describes that not all prostitutes are bad, some of them are kind. Yu Mo shows that there is still love from prostitutes in the middle of war through their sacrifice to save the young girls' life.

Before Nanjing fell to the hands of the Japanese, Nanjing was the capital city of Jiangsu province of the People's Republic of China and the second largest city after Shanghai. In 1937 during the Sino-Japanese war that preceded World War II, Nanjing became a bloody land where massacres happened. The Japanese wanted to take a control of Nanjing as their territory. The arrival of Japanese imperial armies brought suffering to Chinese civilians. The Japanese armies were encouraged by their officers to invent even more horrible ways to slaughter the Chinese population in Nanjing because the Japanese had to occupy Nanjing soon. The Japanese military advanced in China and fought against Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese military in Nanjing. The Japanese killed many Chinese civilians. As many as 200,000 to 300,000 people died and their bodies lay along Nanjing's road. The massacre was not only about murder but the Japanese armies created many atrocities against people living in Nanjing especially the crimes against women in Nanjing. This greatest accident is known as the Nanjing Massacre.

Woman's struggle during wartime is identical to hunger and chaotic condition. Many females thought that when they were in a middle of a war, they would die. In this movie, the Japanese armies made women in Nanjing their slaves or sex objects. The Japanese armies raped women in Nanjing whether they were young children or women, then the Japanese armies raped and killed women cruelly. Between 20,000 to over 80,000 females were sexually assaulted in Nanjing. The Nanjing Massacre left many women as victims. It is hard to run away from militaries so many women were forced to be sexual slaves in the military. Susan Brownmiller, one of the first historians to deal with the subject, of war and women, and war rape wrote:

"War provides men with the perfect psychological backdrop to give vent

to their contempt for women. The maleness of the military—the brute

power of weaponry exclusive to their hands, the spiritual bonding of men

at arms, the manly discipline of orders given and orders obeyed, the

simple logic of the hierarchical command—confirms for men what they

long suspect—that women are peripheral to the world that counts. Men

who rape are ordinary man, made unordinary by entry into the most

exclusive male-only club in the world." (Brownmiller, 1975:22)

The crimes against women during wartime are well-known as a form of rape. The Japanese armies raped and abused around 80,000 women in Nanjing's massacre. According to *The Nanjing Atrocities: Crimes of War p.186* by Facing History and Ourselves Publication, women were raped as a form of power and dehumanization. Many women were forcibly held as military sexual slaves. The militaries need women as their sexual objects. It may be a strategy to destroy entire communities or cities. Many women thought that they would die when they were in a war. The Japanese armies raped women living in Nanjing and then killed them brutally whether there are young or elderly. The presence of women during wartime suffer from loss. The role of women in war is important for the militaries to satisfy their sexual needs. Women have no rights during wartime. Women are hard to express what they feel during wartime.

In a chaotic condition such as war, women are weak and helpless, women are objects of suffering at war. The Nanjing Massacre becomes a background of inception from the Chinese movie entitled "The Flowers of War" directed by Zhang Yimou. The film tells about the condition of women during wartime. It speaks about how women are treated during wartime and how they react to the treatment. This movie focuses on women's condition in a period of war. Women during the war do not have any dignity and rights. When the armies enter the woman's body and it causes physical pain and, the loss of personal dignity and self-determination, and it is an attack on the woman's identity. Any struggle for dignity and self-determination is rooted in the control of one's own body, primarily the control of physical access to one's body (Dworkin, 1990:243).

The women struggle to stay alive and women at war are objected to as a sexual slave. In most cases, a rape victim does not feel she is exposed to a sexual act but an extreme and humiliating form of violence directed against herself and her body. Even rapists themselves hardly ever speak of a sexual experience. Instead, they express feelings of hostility, aggression, power, and dominance (Feldmann, 1992:7). The rapist or part of militaries raped women for showing their feelings about the condition in war is truly hard. The

rapist distributes their feelings during wartime through rape.

From the background above, the writer found how women are mistreated by the militaries during wartime. It talks about the suffering, the treatment of women, and actions, which the writer finds unbelievable. The movie is interesting because even though it is about war, there are messages of love, life, and sacrifice from the main female character. Although the main female character of the movie is a prostitute, the movie shows that even prostitutes can help each other. This analysis will talk about the suffering that women face during the Nanjing massacre as portrayed in the movie The Flowers of War. The writer chooses to analyze the female characters in the hope that she can make readers aware of the condition of women during wartime and the kind of treatment or suffering they have to face.

METHOD

The analysis method in this research was conducted by using movie semiotics where this method aims to analyze the movie through a "symbol" both verbal and in the form of a picture. By analyzing any symbols in the film "The Flowers of War", the writer will identify how the Japanese militaries treat women and the kind of suffering also mistreatment against women during wartime. In addition, the author will also identify how women face dangerous situations such as during the war in order to survive. The picture and text in the movie will slightly express the women's story during wartime.

ANALYSIS OF THE MOVIE

The portrayal of women during wartime in this analysis as represented in Zhang Yimou's The Flowers of War will be elaborated on 3 (three) subjects. There are 1) the Japanese military's treatment of the women during the Nanjing Massacre as portrayed in the movie 2) the kind of suffering women has to face as described in the movie 3) the survival attempts of women in the dangerous situation that they have to face.

The Japanese Militaries Treatment to the Women during the Nanjing Massacre as Portrayed in the Movie

This film brings the portrayal of the Japanese militaries as the colonizers taking control of one of an area in China and it is Nanjing. Not only the portrayal of the militaries but also the portrayal of women during wartime. The portrayals of women in this film are parted into two groups: the young girls led by Shu and the prostitutes led by Yu Mo. Both of these groups have to face the Japanese

militaries to save themselves from the treatment that the Japanese do to Chinese civilians during wartime, especially women. The Chinese militaries try to save the rest civilians in Nanjing but they failed because day-to-day the Chinese armies pass away by the attacks from the Japanese militaries. The Chinese armies save the women during wartime but because of the limited gun that the Chinese armies have, they cannot run from the Japanese to save the women that still live in Nanjing.

During this time, the Japanese militaries show their anger and their power either China militaries or civilians in Nanjing. Nanjing Massacre left two groups of women who struggle to the safety zone, it is located at the Winchester Cathedral. The Japanese armies will never come into the church because the Western block guides it. But as the militaries that have power and authority, the Japanese militaries break the rules to come into the church then they see many young girls in the church. As visualized in the movie, the Japanese militaries run and try to catch and then rape all the young girls inside the church. The Japanese militaries drag the young girls inside the church.

The Japanese militaries treat women badly during wartime and women tend to be sexual objects at war either it is young or elderly because the Japanese militaries rape women and also girls. Women live in a chaotic condition where they cannot escape from rape. The Japanese militaries are so excited to get and rape the women especially when they know the presence of young girls.

The Japanese militaries treat women as people who have no dignity and look down on all women during the war. The Japanese militaries never think how women's fate during wartime. The militaries just do their duty as a part of the military. Rape includes an international war crime where the militaries can treat women unwell or the woman is getting pregnant. The Japanese treat women as entertainment in the middle of the war. The Japanese militaries express their feeling of war through the murder and rape of women as the civilians of Nanjing. They cannot go back home during the war then when they meet a girl, they can deliver their sexual desire to the women they are colonizing. The Japanese militaries catch women and force them to serve the militaries well. They will kill a woman who denies the military to rape. The Japanese militaries perceive women during the war are not truly human.

As part of the military, the Japanese militaries ruled during

wartime and the treatment of women gets a part of the rules of the head commissioner who leads the battle or colonialism. The militaries shall do the command from the head and one of the commands is rape. The Japanese militaries need to do it to show the power of the Japanese militaries but also to amuse the militaries during wartime and also to take control of an area where they shall colonize, with the rapes and murder, civilians in Nanjing will abate. The Japanese militaries shall evacuate Chinese civilians in Nanjing but it takes a long time then the commissioner instructs the Japanese militaries in Nanjing to rape women in Nanjing and kill Chinese civilians.

The viewers of this film can see that the Japanese militaries mistreat women, especially young girls. The Japanese militaries torture the young girl who tries to run from the rape. The Japanese militaries scare all young girls and when the Japanese can catch them, the militaries tear up the clothes that young girls wear. If there is one woman who fights back against the Japanese armies, the Japanese armies will kill them through throw them down as in this movie. In this case, as seen in the scene, the Japanese militaries kill one young girl because this girl fights back against the army that wants to rape her. The young girls still keep their bodies while two Japanese militaries rip the uniform from this girl and because the girl is against the militaries, both militaries release her body down up.

The present writer sees that the militaries have another purpose through the bad treatment the Japanese militaries do because the general of Japanese militaries named Hasegawa offers the women to be guarded by the Japanese militaries from the outside of church and Hasegawa as the general of militaries apologizes for all behavior that the several members of Japanese militaries do toward the young girls at the church. This action portrays that there is another purpose for militaries for the rest of the women in Nanjing whether it is good or bad. The Japanese militaries keep the women inside the church and forbid them to go out of the church. The Japanese armies stand in every corner of a gate at the church. The Japanese militaries really save the women after the incident inside the church, and after it, the Japanese militaries never attack the girls to be raped anymore.

In the end, actually, the viewers can see the purpose of the Japanese militaries to save women is not actually to save women but to invite them to join the victory celebration of the Japanese for taking down Nanjing. The Japanese militaries keep them until the day is coming for the Japanese to pick women up to join the celebration. The women never know what will Japanese do toward

them during the celebration. But the present writer concludes that women become the sexual objects in the celebration which is why the Japanese militaries never chase women inside the church to be raped and choose to wait until the celebration day comes. In the end, the Japanese militaries treat women as their sexual needs. The Japanese militaries want women just to fulfill their sexual desire during the war or after the war. The possibility is all women that the Japanese militaries bring to the celebration cannot leave Nanjing safely.

This movie shows that the Japanese are rigorous people, it is proved when one of the Japanese militaries counts the total of girls who live inside the church and the Japanese do not want to miss even one girl for the celebration. All young girls shall go to the celebration without any excuses. The Japanese militaries do not tell to girls about what will happen. The Japanese colonel named Hasegawa explains that the Japanese invite them to the celebration to see all girls sing in the celebration as before when Hasegawa ever heard the young girls sing a song in front of him at the church. Being weak and having no authority, the young girls cannot rebel against the commands. The colonel and general of the Japanese militaries only pick the women for the celebration and not for John, the western fake priest who saves the women inside the church.

In this part, the Japanese militaries do not know about the presence of prostitutes inside the church so the bad treatment is faced only by the young girls because the Japanese armies know their presence and then suffer them with acts of violence to be raped. While the prostitutes are safe from the violence that the Japanese militaries do. The treatments that the young girls get from the Japanese militaries portray how cruel the militaries are. They do not consider the women they will treat, the militaries just think about their desires and wreak them on the women. The reason behind the treatment also may be perceived as the symbol of the power of the militaries that they success to control Nanjing and also to control the rest civilians in Nanjing.

Kind of Suffering Women Have to Face as Described in the Movie

The women who live in the middle of war need to face several sufferings that the colonizers or militaries do to them. As in this movie, it is clearly visualized that the women have many challenges during the war time to save themselves. The women are also identic with many suffering they have to face. Otherwise, war is also identic to women. Based on the theories about women at war in the previous chapter, women suffer lots than men during wartime.

Logically, the militaries will never rape the men otherwise the militaries chase women to be raped.

Women have to fight many acts of violence and atrocities. The common suffering of women during wartime is rape while the second is murder. This movie shows that women are drawn as the sexual objects of the colonizers. The women were raped without tolerance and then the colonizers kill them. The women cannot deny what the militaries do to them. They cannot maintain their right not to be raped. Rape becomes an international war crime so it is allowed to assault women during wartime.

The colonizers force women to serve their sexual desire and become sexual slavery for the militaries as the present writer sees in this film, the suffering that the women have to face is rape whether they are young or elderly. Many women were sexually assaulted during wartime. In this film, the suffering of rape portrays by two women of members prostitutes named Dou and Lan. Their deaths were vain. The Japanese armies kill Dou and Lan when they go back to the brothel where they work as prostitutes before the war of Nanjing. The Japanese armies catch them and rape them after that the Japanese armies kill them both brutally, especially Dou. Dou is raped in turn by many members of militaries. The militaries tie Dou on the chair and the militaries start to rape Dou but in the end, Dou is against the last army who wants to rape her, because of her rebellion, this army kills Dou brutally and the militaries leave her bodies there.

While Lan runs away from outside of the safety zone, church, with Dou, the Japanese armies also kill Lan and rape her after death of Lan. The Japanese militaries have lots of sexual desires for women. The Japanese armies rape Lan and leave her in the first place where the Japanese armies kill her. Both of these women feel the suffering of rape and even also murder during wartime.

Similar to what the young girls feel when the arrival of Japanese armies into the church. But in this part, the young girls do not take lots of suffering because the Japanese armies did not kill the young girls brutally, one of the young girls passed away because she falls herself down when the Japanese armies want to rape her. It is another suffering that the women face, to avoid sexual crimes, the women choose to kill themselves like what the young girls will do in this film after the young girls know about what will the Japanese armies do in the celebration to them, the young girls lead by Shu arrange a plan to jump from the top of a church before the arrival of Japanese armies to pick them up to the celebration. The thought of the crimes that Japanese militaries do especially rapes ruin the

psychology of young girls and it makes young girls afraid to face the next life anymore, at last, they choose to finish their life on their own, not by the Japanese army's hand.

Other sufferings that the women have to face are hunger and chaotic condition where the condition during the war is far from serenity. Women must run and hide from one place to another to find a safety zone because the refugee camp in Nanjing is not safe anymore, all women who live in camp become the sexual slavery by the military. The condition of war like this makes women cannot sleep and always be ready if the Japanese armies attack them, they are ready to run or hide. They have been living in fear during wartime. The women either prostitutes or young girls have limited stock of food and even they never eat during wartime at the church. Like what the film pictures that because of the limited stocks of food, colonel Hasegawa from the Japanese military gives the food to young girls inside the church.

This film also shows us that women lose their human rights during wartime. They are treated badly by the colonizers and women have no right to maintain their freedom for themselves. The role of women is misused by the militaries or colonizers. The role of women as nurses, doctors, or soldiers do not appear anymore. The suffering comes closer to the women since rape is allowed during wartime. The colonizers and militaries raped them brutally and they are not treated as humans anymore. The humanity of women disappears during wartime.

The rights to live for women are closed. The women waste their life because of the colonialism period and become objects of the war between the country. The women have no choice but to stay alive during wartime. The suffering of women does not stop until this but as visualized in this movie, the Japanese armies do not let the young girls live in the church, the Japanese armies want to pick them all up to the celebration where in the celebration the Japanese militaries will make women as the sexual objects. It means that even young girls have no right to continue living during wartime. All, the definite suffering women will face during wartime are rape and murder, and many victims of women during the period of war.

The Survival Attempts of Women to the Dangerous Situation that They Have to Face

In the middle of the war, the women struggle lots. Many actions that the women created during the war to save themselves from the militaries. The women must find a safe place to hide from the militaries if the refugee camp is not safe anymore. The women must be brave to spend the war to arrive at the safety zone visualized in this movie, prostitutes and young girls must be brave to spend the Nanjing road along the war to arrive at the Winchester Cathedral, which is a zone guided by the Western block. Both these groups struggle a lot to arrive at the church and even several young girls are dead on the way to the church because the Japanese militaries kill them and know their presence when they hide.

Both groups are women either young or mature, but the different condition inside the church appears when the young girls know that the mature women are prostitutes. The young girls ignore the presence of prostitutes in the church but the prostitutes try to enter the church by climbing the wall in front of the gate. The prostitutes think that even prostitutes need to be protected and deserve to get protection and a place to hide and save themselves. Other actions appear inside the church during the war until the unpredictable action that prostitutes make for the young girls.

The prostitutes hide under the crypt of the church and their arrival creates many actions between these two groups in the church to face the war. Either with the young girls, the young girls have to run and hide from the Japanese militaries although they are now inside the church the militaries cannot stop finding the rest of the Chinese civilians in Nanjing to be raped and killed. They fight so hard during the war but the portrayal of prostitutes shows the spectators that there is still love in the middle of the war.

The women keep each other such as Yu Mo who wants to save the young girls from letting the young girls come into the crypt but the Japanese militaries have already seen the young girls and there is no time for young girls to walk down to the crypt. And also with the young girls, the young girls save the prostitute's life, the young girls did not talk to the Japanese armies about the prostitute's presence under the crypt. Both groups have never talked to each other since the arrival of prostitutes in the church because the young girls perceive the prostitutes as dirty women and bad and they are not worthy to enter the church.

The prostitutes show that they are not bad as the young girls think. They still think about the young girl's fate when the Japanese militaries chase them to be raped. In this incident, the prostitutes

cannot do anything to save the young girls because they do not know what must they do. The prostitutes feel fear like what the young girls feel.

The women in this film never give up on the situation that they have to face. The young girls and prostitutes fight back against the suffering they have to face such as when the Japanese militaries want to catch and rape them, the young girls, Dou and Lan still try to run away from the militaries although in the end Dou and Lan were killed and raped by the Japanese militaries but at least the women during the war try to fight back the militaries who try to attack them. The women must save themselves in their own way to stay alive but prostitutes remind each other that they will stay alive together if all people cooperate to save each other.

Since the Japanese armies know the presence of young girls inside the church. The young girls and prostitutes reinforce each other to the situation they have to face. The young girls act like they have no choice but to fight back against the Japanese militaries anymore. The young girls just pray to God in the hopes to stay alive during Nanjing's war. The prostitutes show that even people see prostitutes as bad people but they can feel sympathy feeling to the young girls about the two members of young girls dying. The leader of a prostitute group, Yu Mo, thinks that prostitutes owe young girls life. It is described when the Japanese militaries enter the church and find only the young girls but the young girls did not tell the armies about prostitutes that hide under the crypt. The young girls face the Japanese militaries without any help from prostitutes however the young girls really suffer when the Japanese try to catch them and want to rape the young girls. Shu, a leader of the young girl's group choose not to tell the militaries about the presence of prostitutes so that the prostitute's life are safe from the Japanese militaries at that time.

As young girls, their minds and ability are limited especially when they have to face the invitation from the Japanese militaries. The invitation is to celebrate the Japanese victory in Nanjing. The young girls know how cruel the Japanese militaries are and the young girls guess that they will be the sexual objects in the celebration, cause of this thought, the young girls try to give up on this war situation by jumping from the top of a church. The young girls decide to kill themselves first before the arrival of Japanese militaries to pick them up for celebration but this action is imprisoned by Yu Mo's idea to replace the young girl's position.

The prostitute leader, Yu Mo, shows love to the young girls. Although Yu Mo never knows the young girls but Yu Mo thinks about the young girl's fate if the Japanese armies pick them all up to the celebration and treat the young girls badly. Because of sympathy feelings and life experiences Yu Mo has when she is thirteen, her father raped her and as she grows up, she chooses to be a prostitute. Yu Mo wants to protect the young girl's life from being the sexual objects of the Japanese militaries. Yu Mo asks her friends about her idea to replace the young girl's position. Unpredictable responses that all prostitutes agree about what Yu Mo thinks and that all prostitutes are willing to be picked by the Japanese militaries for the celebration. The prostitutes make a disguise to fool the Japanese armies to replace the young girl's position. All prostitutes agree about Yu Mo's idea, they want to prove that prostitutes are not bad as the myth or people think. The prostitutes sacrifice themselves to save the young girl's life. Yu Mo also thinks that the young girls still have many chances to continue their lives while prostitutes who work for the sexual needs of many men who pay them know how the ways to handle the Japanese militaries as their sexual objects.

The prostitutes show the present writer that there is love even in a war situation. The sacrifice that prostitutes do for the young girls decreases suffering and fear of the young girls about the invitation from Japanese militaries. The young girls feel so sorry about their bad perceptions of prostitutes because an action that prostitutes want to save the young girl's life through the sacrifice that they create. The prostitutes make the situation get better after the suffering from the Japanese military happens to young girls. They never know each other either prostitutes or young girls help each other to save a life. They show their caring and love for each other. They protect one another and women, especially prostitutes, prostitutes never show their fear about what will the Japanese militaries do toward them during the celebration later. The prostitutes spread happiness to the young girls while prostitutes prepare themselves in a disguise. The prostitutes convince the young girls that they young girls can escape Nanjing safely and there is no one for them must go to the celebration. Yu Mo also explains that after the Japanese militaries come to the church to pick up prostitutes, the young girls can go to the west to escape Nanjing safely. These kinds of sacrifices make times during war get better through decisions, actions, or ideas that prostitutes create. The women at war are more sensitive to each other. They can act out from what common people predict but the portrayal of prostitutes in this film shows the present writer that there is still hope to live as long as they reinforce, care and love each other.

CONCLUSSION

This film portrays the condition of people in Nanjing, China during Japanese colonialism to control Nanjing, China. The war runs for six weeks period in Nanjing. The rest of the people after six weeks period are women, there are the prostitutes and young girls group. This film moreover shows women's conditions during the war either the prostitutes' group led by Yu Mo or the young girls led by Shu. The women struggle so hard to survive at war. This film shows how women are treated by the Japanese militaries during the war in Nanjing. The militaries treat women as sexual objects. The Japanese militaries rape and murder the women brutally.

Most of the suffering during the war that women have to face as described in this film are fear feelings, hunger, rape, and also murder. It is hard for women to find food during the war and hard to get tranquility at that time because they have to be ready to hide when the Japanese militaries try to enter the church and find them suddenly. The women become sexual objects from colonizers or militaries during wartime. Women suffer a lot more than men. The militaries will catch women who still live in Nanjing after six weeks period then the militaries force women to be sexual objects during wartime either young or elderly. If women are against the militaries, the militaries will kill them cruelly.

This dangerous situation in war makes any actions appear during the war to each character that exists in the film. The actions that are surely shown in this film are sacrifices. Every character in this film, John, prostitutes led by Yu Mo, young girls led by Shu, and George make a sacrifice to young girls. They sacrifice themselves to keep the young girls alive and safe. The young girls also do the same action to prostitutes, the young girls do not tell the Japanese militaries about the presence of prostitutes under the crypt. The prostitutes and young girls reinforce each other and care for each other during wartime. The prostitutes and young girls save each other. While the prostitutes and young girls fight back against the Japanese militaries who want to rape them, they run and hide from the Japanese even in the end the Japanese can catch them or kill them.

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