The 2019 Anlin Ku Lecture: Dr. Ying-Ying Chang

In December of 1937, the Japanese Imperial Army invaded the Chinese city of Nanking and slaughtered thousands of Chinese soldiers and civilians in a catastrophic event now referred to as the Nanking Massacre or the Rape of Nanking. The massacre earned the latter title due to the Japanese soldiers’ brutal sexual assaults of tens of thousands of women. A subject of controversy to this day, the history of Nanking became the subject of worldwide attention in part because of the ground-breaking research of the young Chinese journalist, Iris Chang.

Chang’s book on the Nanking Massacre (right) unearthed previously unknown details about the event and remained on the New York Times best seller list for ten weeks.
The granddaughter of survivors, Chang felt curious about the world that her grandparents escaped and embarked upon a monumental research quest that would thrust her into the spotlight as a voice for the victims and an activist for justice. It would also claim her life.

For the 2019 Anlin Ku Lecture, The Center for Asian Studies in conjunction with the School of Arts and Humanities and the Ackerman Center invited Iris Chang’s mother, Dr. Ying-Ying Chang, to speak about the memoir she wrote about her daughter’s experiences and life as a devoted researcher. In her lecture, "The Woman Who Could Not Forget," Dr. Chang discussed what inspired her daughter’s research, written works, discoveries and activism. She also drew attention to the impact that her daughter had and the subsequent works that she inspired.

Aside from Iris Chang’s accomplishments, her mother shared how her daughter shouldered an incredible burden to ensure that the victims’ stories would be told and remembered and the toll that it took on her health. Despite her suffering, she remained committed to conveying the stories of the victims of Nanking. Her mother quoted her saying, “People die twice – once as mortals, and once in memory. I weep when stories are lost. Words are the only way to preserve the essence of a soul.”

Dr. Chang concluded with a short video of a performance that illustrated how the horrors her daughter uncovered continued to haunt her for the rest of her life but never stopped her pursuit for justice and truth. Over 200 people attended the lecture. At the end of Dr. Chang’s presentation, the audience gave her a standing ovation (below). Both her lectures and her memoir, The Woman Who Could Not Forget: Iris Chang Before and Beyond the Rape of Nanking, uphold her daughter’s legacy and carries on her mission for giving a voice to the voiceless.