

“To Serve Revenge for the Dead”: Chinese Communist Responses to Japanese War Crimes in the PRC Foreign Ministry Archive, 1949–1956

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ABSTRACT Using newly available documents from the PRC Foreign Ministry Archive, this article traces the evolving legacies of the War of Resistance in the first seven years of the People’s Republic. Analysis is offered of PRC campaigns against Japanese bacteriological war crimes, criticisms of American dealings with Japanese war criminals, and the 1956 trial of Japanese at Shenyang. Throughout, behind-the-scenes tensions with the Soviet Union and internal bureaucratic struggles over the Japanese legacy regarding these matters are revealed. The article thereby aims to shed light on how the War of Resistance affected post-war China’s foreign relations, demonstrating how the young Republic advantageously used wartime legacies as diplomatic tools in relations with the superpowers and within the orchestrated clangour of domestic propaganda campaigns.

On 15 August 1945, Emperor Hirohito announced Japan’s unconditional surrender to the Allied forces, effectively ending decades of Japanese hostilities with China and opening the door to a revived Chinese civil war. Although the Kantō Army cannons had been silenced, the physical and emotional legacies of Japan’s invasion and occupation could not be so easily erased from China’s national memory.¹ With the victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the civil war and subsequent consolidation of communist power in the early 1950s, leaders and ideologues in Beijing frequently returned to the legacies of Japanese imperialism as one of a variety of means used to foment mass support for the new regime.² After the Sino-Japanese rapprochement of the 1970s, the

1 Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); for general monographs on the political situation in China during and after the “Manchurian Incident,” see Sun Youli, *China and the Origins of the Pacific War, 1931–1941* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1993); Parks Coble, *Facing Japan: Chinese Politics and Japanese Imperialism, 1931–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

2 Julia Strauss, “Paternalist terror: the campaign to suppress counterrevolutionaries and regime consolidation in the People’s Republic of China, 1950–1953,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 44,

CCP temporarily submerged its reliance on these anti-Japanese themes, but they erupted again, with renewed vigour, in the 1990s. The recent emergence of strident Chinese rhetoric about Japan – bridging the gap between Party and people and the Party’s conscious re-crafting of historical narratives to emphasize Chinese victimization – has given scholars concerned with the uses and abuses of anti-Japanese nationalism much food for thought.³ However, in assessing the deep structure of these nationalistic assaults on Japan’s wartime past, scholars hardly ever turn to the 1950s, and sustained analyses of the growth and evolution of anti-Japanese nationalism in the decade are rare.⁴

In recent years, the PRC Foreign Ministry Archive has begun the painfully slow process of declassifying and releasing documents for public use, including significant numbers relating to Japan. From the CCP perspective, these documents are intended to reveal the Party’s close attention to, and disposal of, Japanese war crimes. And indeed, they illustrate multiple ways in which the legacy of Japanese war crimes animated (and were often manipulated by) the Chinese government in the early 1950s. Reading beyond current CCP intentions for these documents reveals contradictions and a more nuanced approach by the CCP in the 1950s in which deep anger at Japan is displaced by a much more pragmatic and even amnesiac outlook. While it is unfortunate that records after 1960 have not yet been released, sufficient archival material exists for a reassessment of the CCP’s interpretation of the Japanese wartime legacy in China.

Reassessing the changing Chinese images of Japan in the 1950s is rendered particularly significant by the drastic fluctuations of China’s Japan policy in that decade. The beginning of the 1950s witnessed a grisly emphasis on Japanese wartime atrocities, but by 1956 this had given way to a sentiment bordering on forgiveness as China sought rapprochement. Zhou Enlai’s diplomatic drive failed, rolled back by the rise of rightist Kishi Nobusuke in Japan and the radicalism of the Great Leap Forward, but the disintegration of hopes for friendly relations

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No. 1 (2002), pp. 80–103, and “Morality, coercion, and state building by campaign in the early PRC: regime consolidation and after, 1949–1956,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 188 (2006), pp. 891–912. Links between post-war anti-Japanese sentiment and mass propaganda campaigns are analysed superficially in Adam Cathcart, “Chinese nationalism in the shadow of Japan, 1945–1950,” PhD dissertation, Ohio University, 2005. For innovative but often general discussion of Sino-Japanese relations during the US occupation of Japan, see Okamoto Koichi, “Imaginary settings: Sino-Japanese-United States relations during the occupation years,” PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2000.

3 Peter Hays Gries, *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Joshua Fogel, “Introduction: the Nanjing Massacre in history,” in Joshua Fogel (ed.), *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Parks Coble, “China’s ‘new-remembering’ of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 190 (2007), pp. 394–410.

4 Two recent monographs analyse the evolution of war memory in the 1950s, but the primary focus in these works is on Japan rather than China, and the source base is largely Japanese. Takashi Yoshida, *The Making of the Rape of Nanking: History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Franziska Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945–2005* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006).

between the estranged neighbours did not diminish the potency of the Japan issue for Chinese leaders. Thus, the decade of the 1950s reveals the full spectrum of CCP tactics towards Japan and, historically, the first CCP attempts to deal with the Japanese legacy as the party in power. Legacies of Japan's invasion remained pervasive in official Chinese narratives, as the CCP skilfully modified its interpretations of the past to serve both domestic and foreign agendas of the young People's Republic.

In understanding the Cold War interpretation of Japanese wartime atrocities in China, it is instructive to turn to work recently produced by scholars of post-war Europe. In examining the legacies of German war crimes in divided Europe, historian Norman Goda explains how Nazi crimes became entwined with the international and domestic politics of the Cold War. In his recent examination of German war criminals in Spandau Prison, Goda verifies that perpetrators of atrocities in the Second World War became pawns in the Cold War, veritable "political prisoners." He bluntly and accurately states that "war criminals became factors in international relations."⁵ Could the same be said for Japanese war criminals in Asia? The history of the PRC from 1949 to 1956, as shown by the documents about that period held by the PRC Foreign Ministry Archive, suggests that war crimes and trials of war criminals played at least as much of a political role in post-war Asia as in Europe.⁶

In the chaos immediately following the Second World War, the links between past Japanese war crimes and Cold War policy on mainland China are slightly more convoluted than their European counterparts. As the Chinese Communist Party expanded its territorial hold, establishing a government and consolidating power remained the primary objective. Mass movements were highly significant instruments in pushing forward the CCP domestic agenda in this period.⁷ Foreign Ministry documents lend weight to the assertion that mass movements were indeed used to promote regime consolidation, but also re-emphasize the link between domestic consolidation or security and a "correct" foreign policy.⁸ By early 1950, the CCP seized hold of specific legacies of Japanese war crimes, especially bacteriological weapons atrocities, to infuse mass propaganda with anti-Japanese nationalism. For contemporary researchers, the individual testimonials present in the Foreign Ministry Archive offer important insights into how people remembered the Japanese occupation and provide

5 Norman J.W. Goda, *Tales from Spandau: Nazi Criminals and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 10. See also Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

6 Kodama Yoshio, *Sugamo Diary* (trans. Taro Fukuda) (Japan: Radiopress, 1960), pp. 4, 264–68; Utsumi Aiko, *Sugamo Prison: The Peace Movement of the War Criminals* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2004).

7 Specifically, Strauss addresses the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries as one factor in CCP consolidation of power in China; see Strauss, "Paternalist terror" and "Morality, coercion, and state building."

8 Chen Jian's work has repeatedly demonstrated the links between domestic and foreign policy in the PRC; see Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

some understanding of the degree to which the atrocities committed by Japanese armed forces could be used by the CCP to educate and mobilize the public.

The abundance of testimonials and personal exposés of Japanese BW atrocities in the Foreign Ministry Archive should prompt a note of caution, as these released documents represent only official memory and were probably released to further the contemporary narrative of Japanese atrocities in China. Party motives aside, however, to scholars of the consolidation period or anti-Japanese sentiment, these testimonials reveal striking contradictions between Party and popular remembrance of Japan's atrocities. While the Party moved quickly to make connections between Japan and the United States, the Chinese people appeared less willing to link the US with specific atrocities committed during the War of Resistance.

The Foreign Ministry Archive materials also reveal the depth and persistence of interdepartmental co-operation and competition in dealing with legacies of the War of Resistance. Because of interest regarding Japan among the constituent parts of the new PRC government, issues normally placed strictly in the sphere of foreign relations ballooned into much more massive operations. Analysing and publicizing the legacy of Japanese war crimes became a task that engaged the participation of virtually every ministry in the government. Our analysis reveals three primary areas in which the War of Resistance remained most resonant within the PRC bureaucracy: in the handling of Japanese bacteriological war crimes evidence; in Sino-Soviet discussions on war criminals and joint condemnations of American occupation policy towards war criminals in Japan; and in preparation for the 1956 trials of Japanese prisoners at Shenyang 沈阳.⁹

The Legacy of Japanese Bacteriological War Crimes

The lingering passions of Chinese resentment of Japan's wartime bacteriological weapons (*xijunzhanqi* 细菌战器, BW) programmes, partially as a result of their breadth, provided the young Chinese government with one of the most potent publicity weapons for both its domestic and international agendas.¹⁰ In the politically charged atmosphere of the Cold War, the CCP was well aware that the failure of the Allied Powers to indict those responsible for atrocities committed in the name of BW research (such as Ishii Shiro) placed the United States at odds with public opinion in China. And, when politically convenient, the

9 Important scholarship exists on the early development of China's Foreign Ministry. For interesting commentary on the role of ideology and Mao Zedong Thought in early diplomatic efforts, see Ronald C. Keith, *The Diplomacy of Zhou Enlai* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 5–37; for discussion specifically on relations and negotiations with Japan, see Kurt Werner Radtke, *China's Relations with Japan, 1945–83: The role of Liao Chengzhi* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1990).

10 For foundational scholarship on Japan's Second World War era BW programme which rarely delves into the legacies of these programmes in China, see David Williams and Peter Wallace, *Unit 731: The Japanese Army's Secret of Secrets* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989); and Sheldon Harris, *Factories of Death: Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932–1945* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

memory of Japan's BW programme and reminders of its links to the United States would solidify the notion of America as the new enemy.¹¹

It was not the CCP, however, who first used BW rhetoric to serve Cold War objectives. On 24 December 1949 the Soviet Union commenced the trial of 12 Japanese soldiers, including former members of Japanese BW units, before a military court in the Russian far eastern city of Khabarovsk.¹² After the Soviet announcement of these trials Beijing's initial response was rushed, consisting of little more than praise for the Soviet initiative.¹³ The trials represented a fairly blatant Soviet attempt to harness resentment of Japan to strengthen popular Chinese support for the impending Sino-Soviet Treaty, even though they revealed a lack of co-ordination between Mao Zedong and his new Soviet allies. Considering the fact that the CCP had just declared a government in Beijing in October of the same year, it is somewhat surprising that, after an initially hasty response, the Chinese government was able to mobilize so rapidly. In fact, after a short time, the CCP began to take full advantage of the Soviet-led propaganda offensive against Japanese and American war crimes as justification for a stronger Sino-Soviet friendship.¹⁴

In the weeks and months following the Khabarovsk trials, the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Health Ministry, People's Liberation Army, Personnel Departments and Xinhua co-operated in the stimulation of widespread anti-BW education and propaganda campaigns stemming from the Khabarovsk allegations. These campaigns, among the first country-wide mass movements of the new People's Republic, represent important examples of continued anti-Japanese sentiment in China, reveal the agency of the Soviet Union in promoting the anti-Japanese legacy in China, and indicate the CCP's methodology for co-ordinating a nationwide propaganda campaign. Furthermore, the need to publicize the Khabarovsk trials within the confines of an emerging official narrative facilitated the consolidation of departmental and central power. It encouraged rapid development of the PRC's mass education infrastructure in its

11 The 1952 anti-BW movements are a perfect example of this linkage, in that the CCP succeeded in linking Japan's BW experiments with allegations of US employment of their results to launch BW attacks on North Korea and Manchuria. Surprisingly, although the 1952 allegations have received much attention, only Milton Leitenberg has explicitly linked them to Japanese atrocities. See Milton Leitenberg, "New Russian evidence on the Korean War biological warfare allegations: background and analysis," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 11 (1998), pp. 185–99; see also Patricia Nash, "Plague and propaganda: the significance of biological weapons allegations in the Korean War," *Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal*, Vol. 33 (2008), pp. 93–114.

12 For official information and transcripts from the trials see *Materials on the Trial of Former Servicemen of the Japanese Army Charged with Manufacturing and Employing Bacteriological Weapons* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1950).

13 "Sulian Yuandong binghai junqu junshi fating," *Renmin ribao*, 29 December 1950, p. 4.

14 For further investigation on the legacy of Japan's BW programme within the matrix of Chinese nationalism and Sino-Soviet relations, see Adam Cathcart, "'Against invisible enemies': Japanese biological weapons and China's Cold War, 1949–1950," *Chinese Historical Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2009), pp. 60–89. See also Jing-Bao Nie, "The West's dismissal of the Khabarovsk trial as 'communist propaganda': ideology, evidence and international bioethics," *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2004), pp. 32–42.

formative years through increased intradepartmental co-operation, most obviously between the Foreign Ministry, Health Ministry and Xinhua.

These departments all participated in the dissemination of civilian testimony, but the results were unpredictable as the testimonies did not always contribute to the current Party line. It is clear, however, that resentment towards, and sometime vivid personal memories of, Japan's wartime BW experiments among Chinese citizens showed no signs of fading. Chinese living in some north-eastern areas remained perched above the poisonous remnants of the programme. In 1950, local health departments in Harbin were pushing the central government to conduct more investigations into the Japanese BW experiments, revealing entrenched anti-Japanese resentment in affected areas.¹⁵ Scientific investigations were augmented by interviews, and it seems that no amount of scientific or physical evidence could parallel the sometimes emotion-laden personal testimonies and recollections of the BW programme. Page after page of signatures, thumb prints and scrawled narratives indicate the depth of mass support for investigations and cataloguing of Japanese war crimes.

With knowledge and resentment of Japan's BW programme already abundant among Chinese civilians, one might assume it would be easy to utilize this anti-Japanese nationalism for propaganda purposes. However, civilian testimonials illustrate the degree to which public opinion was actually incongruent with current Party goals. In particular, although CCP propaganda emphasized American complicity with Japan's crimes, citizen testimony rarely included any mention of the United States before 1952.¹⁶ Before resentment of Japan's atrocities in China could be harnessed to increase support for the Foreign Ministry's diplomatic agenda, it was necessary for the government to remould the resentment to a certain extent.¹⁷

- 15 Asian Division of Waijiaobu to Harbin Weishengbu, Foreign Ministry Archives, File 105-00076-02, pp. 84–85. See also "Rijun zhanqu Qingsheng shengwu diaochasuo jiqi chetui qingxing jian wen" ("Institute of Biological Investigation in Japanese-occupied Jinsheng, as well as news regarding the situation after their withdrawal"), 1 March 1950, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00092-07; "Guanyu Anda jujiyao xijun gongchang jishi" ("Record of Anda [city] Jujiyao [district] biological weapons factory"), 19 March 1950, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00092-03. Similar investigations were conducted around the same time in Heilongjiang province, in areas affected by Unit 731 near Pingfan; see "Guanyu Pingfan xijun gongchang jishi" ("Record regarding Pingfang's biological weapons factory"), 19 March 1950, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00092-02; "Heilongjiang renmin kongsu Riben xijun zhanfan jianzheng shu" ("Heilongjiang people accuse Japanese of biological war crimes: record of eyewitness testimony"), 20 March 1950, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00092-05, p. 1.
- 16 The 1952 anti-BW propaganda campaign was targeted at the United States, but many of the themes of the 1950 campaign were resurrected. The testimony of civilians is recorded in *Report of the International Scientific Commission for the Investigation Concerning the Facts Concerning Bacterial Warfare in Korea and China* (Peking, 1952). For analysis of the purpose and results of the 1952 anti-BW rhetoric, see Ruth Rogaski, "Nature, annihilation, and modernity: China's Korean War germ-warfare experience reconsidered," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2002), pp. 381–415; Patricia Nash, "Plague and propaganda: the significance of Korean War bacteriological weapons allegations," *Wittenberg East Asian Studies Journal* (Spring 2008), pp. 93–114.
- 17 *Ibid.*; "Heilongjiang people accuse Japanese of biological war crimes: record of eyewitness testimony"; "Chen Wanli deng ren de baogao ji dui Riji zai quanHua zhi wupin jianyan jieguo de shuoming" ("Chen Wanli and other people's reports on proof of inspection results about Japanese aeroplanes

The urge to yoke anti-Japanese nationalism with the more recent upswing in anti-American propaganda found its outlet in exhibits and meetings to educate the people on Japan's BW programme. These exhibits are of interest because they not only illustrate one of the methods used by the CCP to harness existing anti-Japanese nationalism for specific purposes, but also reveal a surprising degree of Party co-ordination and interdepartmental co-operation on both the national and local levels.¹⁸ One such exhibition began a mere three months after the conclusion of the Khabarovsk trials and exemplifies both the educational and bureaucratic usage of Japanese BW information.¹⁹

The National Sanitation Exhibition, by virtue of its name, would appear to suggest that Health Ministry officials were responsible for its organization and execution. While the Health Ministry was indeed deeply involved, the Chinese Foreign Ministry was arguably more invested in its successful execution. Co-operation between the Health Ministry and the Foreign Ministry is not only confirmed by the bulging file of interdepartmental correspondence, but was explicitly urged by Vice-Foreign Minister Zhang Hanfu 章汉夫. Zhang led the Foreign Ministry's active response to the BW issue, stating that the investigation into "offences of the Japanese bacteriological war criminals in China are not a matter for only one office, but rather are a matter for the entire government." Zhang went on to tell the assembled representatives that Japanese BW crimes were not something the government could deal with "in just a couple of weeks," and were "not just a domestic matter, but an international propaganda matter."²⁰

The multi-faceted nature of Japanese BW offences created a unique atmosphere in which departments were able to collaborate on the same issue with vastly different stated aims. The Health Ministry promoted public awareness of the effects of Japanese BW testing with emphasis on the north-east; the Foreign Ministry elaborated on the wider and international public consequences of Japan's BW programme. In statements concerning the National Sanitation Exhibition, Zhang Hanfu skilfully wove the "present" use of knowledge of Japanese BW crimes (information collected, organized and disseminated by the

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casting things all over China"), 30 March 1950, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00092-12.

- 18 "Tiantan fangbingchu gongren zuotan Rijun zhanjushi de qingshili jilu" ("Record of Temple of Heaven Disease Prevention Office convening a discussion of workers about the situation during the period of Japanese military occupation,") 7 March 1950, PRC Foreign Ministry Archive Document 105-00092-06, pp. 1-9.
- 19 For discussion of hygiene exhibitions in Beijing's Zhongshan Park in July 1949, and the interaction between public health discourse and anti-biological weapons publicity, see Sneh Rajbhandari, "Walking on two legs': the expansion of health services in China, 1949-1956," presented at Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs, St Olaf College, Minnesota, 11 October 2008. See also Rogaski, "Nature, annihilation, and modernity."
- 20 "Guanyu souji Riben xijun zhanfan zuixing de cailiao" ("Materials regarding Japanese biological war crimes guilty activities"), 1950, PRC Foreign Ministry Archive Document 105-00076-02, p. 36.

Health Ministry) into the responsibilities of the Foreign Ministry in 1950, its job being to use the knowledge to “expose, and strike at American imperialism’s plot to revive Japan.”²¹ In this manner, Second World War atrocities both fuelled Cold War imperatives and alliances and facilitated further interdepartmental co-operation.

The spring 1950 Health Ministry exhibition on Japanese BW was subjected to analysis from various departments not directly involved with the organization of the exhibit, demonstrating increasing interest in anti-Japanese feeling within all branches of central and local government. The reports were then forwarded to the main actors, including the Foreign and Health Ministries, thus contributing to the construction of a cohesive propaganda campaign by the Foreign Ministry. A particularly effective example of the dual-edged nature of these external assessments is one authored by the Personnel Department (*renshichu* 人事处) on 5 March 1950. Along with criticism of the exhibit’s “explanations of the spread and harm of the plague and infectivity of the various bacteria from the bacteria bombs,” and calling for a greater emphasis on public health, the report offered a suggestion for effectively emphasizing the anti-Japanese aspect of the exhibit:

Chinese people experienced Japanese bacteria war criminals’ slaughter in person, and after the exhibition, we [therefore] had greater hatred towards war criminals ... We wish to print the [exhibit] materials and make them brochures as the evidence of Japanese criminals’ bloody debt ... We suggest expanding exhibitions in a manner that is bound to propagandize and instruct the public.²²

In its assessment, the Personnel Department makes the self-evident observation that is frequently overlooked in scholarly treatments of the early People’s Republic: the CCP was well aware that Chinese memory of suffering at the hands of Japanese could be a potent means of mass mobilization.²³ The varying degrees of emphasis and participation in these campaigns by local governments, as in examinations of the War of Resistance itself, suggest that responses to Japanese war crimes were not entirely uniform.

Investigations into Japan’s BW programme did not rely on civilian testimony alone, nor were they confined to the north-east. One group of accusations by the Hebei Military District Health Ministry (*Hebei zhejunqu weishengbu* 河北者军区卫生部) was redolent with outrage at Japan. After discussing the difficulties experienced in the resistance war, redeeming these by saying they were “weathered together among the Hebei soldiers and people (*junmin* 军民),” the compilers noted that they wished for their research “to serve [as] revenge for the dead (*women yao wei si zhe baochou* 我们要为死者报仇)” and “stimulate a rich strain of thought” among the people about Japan’s BW crimes.²⁴

21 *Ibid.* p. 36.

22 *Ibid.* p. 51.

23 For further details on the foundations of co-operation between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Xinhua in 1950, see *ibid.* pp. 2–8.

24 “Youguan xizhun zhanfan ziliao” (“Materials concerning biological war crimes”), 23 February 1950, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00092-08.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) was an important agent of memory, and a sizeable number of PLA investigations were distributed throughout the government, informing various agencies about the type of past massacres which the army hoped in the future to prevent. In early 1950 Shi Muqiao 石木乔 of the 205th Health Brigade of the PLA submitted one such report to his unit and subsequently to the Foreign Ministry, unsubtly entitled "Record of Japanese Devils Massacring Central Hebei People by Firing Poison Gas Shells."²⁵ Hebei military officers wrote reports on Japanese BW with gusto, summoning up past indignities to spur the army on to greater acts of patriotic self-defence.

While the PLA was active in investigating Japanese crimes in the early 1950s, few agencies matched the vigour and scope of the nation's various provincial health ministries. Health Ministry officials in Zhejiang were intensely investigating BW in 1950, led by the respected and active Chen Wanli 陈万里. Chen had been in the Health Ministry during the Kuomintang administration, but his participation in building a bulwark against BW was welcomed in the early years of the PRC. For example, Li Dequan 李德全, the omnipresent head of the Health Ministry, showed her trust in Chen's work by inviting him to several key meetings on Japanese BW crimes held in Beijing in early February 1950. In one of Chen's reports of Japanese dispersion of BW-infected items from aeroplanes in 1940, he gives the years in the "Minguo" style, but it takes no edge off his accusations, which extended into analysis of why the Japanese wanted to conquer China in the first place.²⁶ Chen's thorough analysis of the Chengde Incident and recurrent plague outbreaks thereafter represents a cornerstone of CCP anti-Japanese BW documentation.²⁷ In their investigations of plague in Zhejiang, Chinese authors concluded reports with flourishes demanding revenge, and, notably excoriating the Kuomintang for its failure to halt the massacres.²⁸ By reporting Japanese crimes to the new PRC government, former Nationalist sympathizers suggested that the war crimes could, at their most basic level, act as a point of convergence in a still fractured society recovering from massive upheaval.²⁹

25 "Rimo shifang jundu cansha Jizhong renmin de julu" ("Record of Japanese devils massacring mid-Hebei people by firing poison gas shells"), 9 February 1950, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00092-09.

26 "Chen Wanli and other people's reports on proof of inspection results about Japanese aeroplanes casting things over China."

27 "Guanyu Chengde shuyi diaocha baogaoshu" ("Collection of reports concerning investigation of plague in Changde"), 30 March 1950, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00092-17; for a Western examination of the Chengde incident, see Williams and Wallace, *Unit 731: The Japanese Army's Secret of Secrets*, pp. 95–101.

28 "Guanyu Riji zai Jinhua sanbo shuyi ganjun de buchong yijian" ("Opinions regarding Japanese aeroplanes spreading and sowing plague spores in Jinhua that are returning"), 30 March 1952, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00092-13, p. 2.

29 On similar themes of the incorporation of former Nationalist officials into the judiciary of the early PRC, see Qiang Fang, "A mixed picture: complaint systems in Late Republican China," unpublished manuscript. How former collaborators with Japan were incorporated into the anti-Japanese rhetoric and campaigns of the early PRC is an even more vexing question about which virtually nothing has been written. Some examples of the CCP using anti-rightist campaigns to revive accusations of wartime pro-Japanese collaboration, however, can be found in local north-eastern newspapers in 1951, particularly July–August 1951 issues of *Dongbei chaoxian renmin ribao* (Yanji).

Perhaps such continuities imply not some inherently retrospective tendency among Chinese, but that, by the very act of establishing a state, the central government of the PRC had inherited the grievances against Japan dating back to the 1930s. The CCP therefore collected testimonies from an array of geographical and temporal periods, with apparently little regard for the political views of the testifiers. However, testimonies brought to the CCP may also have been regarded by some as a means of cementing loyalties to the regime while emphasizing common anti-Japanese grounds. For instance, the Foreign Ministry received the text of a long speech given by Wan Zuyuan, a witness of Japanese atrocities in the south in 1938, who was not a member of the CCP at the time but working for the Red Cross.³⁰ Another testimony was written by a student who had been enrolled in a puppet university in 1940–41, a background which many Party members might have regarded as suspect.³¹ However, neither testifier's questionable background tainted the ardency of their accusations of Japanese BW crimes in China.

In the months prior to the outbreak of the Korean War, the legacy of Japanese bacteriological war crimes caused the PRC's departmental boundaries to deploy in an interlocking and expanding propaganda front. The scope of activities that fell under "bacteriological weapons defence" was broadening, in part because it necessarily had to adapt to and mirror the widespread nature of the actual crimes. The type of education exemplified in the National Sanitation Exhibition assumed prime importance as the Party implored citizens to understand and remember the Japanese war crimes. Propaganda and education campaigns then instigated questioning into American treatment of Japanese BW criminals to intensify antagonism towards the United States. The Personnel Department, in an assessment of the exhibition, wanted to know how many Japanese BW criminals "were set free by American imperialism," among other questions that were designed to drive home resentment over the American–Japanese immunity deals.³²

In a fascinating example of the continuity from Nationalist to communist control, Judge Mei Ruao 梅汝璈 penned his own opinion on the National Sanitation Exhibition. During the Tokyo trials, Mei had represented the Nationalist government and was a well-known authority on Japanese war crimes and international law. Despite the assertive and accusatory tone of the Personnel Department memo, Mei Ruao's opinion, observed in a letter to the Health Ministry, differed. He wrote:

I received an urgent order to attend the National Sanitation Exhibition and check the materials of the bacteriological war criminals. I therefore went to the Cultural Palace [Wenhuagong] and

30 "Guanyu chengban Riben xijun zhanfan zuotan jiyao" ("Record of conversations regarding punishment of Japanese biological war criminals"), 30 March 1950, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00092-15, pp. 1–2.

31 *Ibid.* p. 3.

32 "Wobu canguan 'Ribei xizhun zhanfan e'xing zhengju zhanlanhui' de jidian yijian" ("A few views of our [personnel] department regarding the 'Japanese BW war crimes evidence exhibition'"), 5 March 1950, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00076-02, p. 51.

Tian'anmen, and talked to the director, checking up on these items and materials. They were not great in quantity, but the design of exhibition was rather good. All the sources originated from areas within the country (most of them were from areas round Haerbin). They were detailed and reliable (there wasn't anything exaggerated or fake). And the exhibit should not force involvement in international diplomacy, as there were not any possibilities to bring international entanglement.³³

Mei's background in international law lent particular weight to his views. Having Mei as an advocate emphasized the legitimacy of the materials in the exhibition. In the 1950s, Mei would occasionally appear in the press to reaffirm the CCP's position on Japanese war crimes.³⁴

Japanese war crimes indeed served CCP purposes in domestic mobilization, but their utility was not restricted to the domestic arena. While Mei asserts the neutrality of the National Sanitation Exhibition, the legacy of Japanese war crimes was not ignored in the formation of China's foreign policy and was, in fact, a very volatile topic.

Japanese War Crimes and Foreign Policy Objectives

It was precisely on the diplomatic front where the legacy of Japanese war crimes was particularly useful in forging alliances, identifying common enemies and covering up disagreements. In the early Cold War, the obvious target of this propaganda was the United States. Meetings between representatives of the Soviet Union and the PRC illustrate the potency of Japan's legacy as fuel for anti-American propaganda. But specific questions and complaints within the Sino-Soviet discussions and debate concerning Japanese war criminals serve as an early indicator of increasing tension between the Soviet Union and PRC.

The apparently close relationship between the United States and Japan, and easily constructed parallels between the American presence in East Asia and that of Imperial Japan, presented the CCP with a sitting target for propaganda campaigns, especially campaigns whose roots lay in the Japanese invasion and occupation of China. In November 1950, as China's focus was shifting to threats posed by the United States in East Asia, General Douglas MacArthur issued his Order No. 5, releasing many Japanese war criminals well before their time had been served. Among those released was the wartime Japanese ambassador to China and former Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru.³⁵ The PRC was well aware of MacArthur's order, and a number of memos concerning the releases were filtered through the Foreign Ministry. In spite of his punishing schedule and unrelenting stream of Korean War crises emerging daily, the issue

33 "Materials regarding Japanese biological war crimes guilty activities," p. 52.

34 "Tan Riben zhanzheng fanzui fenzi de chuli wenti: Guoji faxuejia Mei Ru'ao," *Liaodong ribao*, 24 June 1956, p. 4.

35 Shigemitsu, after his release in 1950, re-entered the Japanese political arena associating himself with the Japanese Right, while Kishi Nobusuke (released on 24 December 1948) eventually re-assumed the position of foreign minister. For an excellent comparative study of Japanese post-war politics and politicians, see Richard J. Samuels, *Machiavelli's Children* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005).

of Shigemitsu's release and its response was personally attended to by Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai.³⁶ The memos themselves, along with the marginalia and notes made by Zhou, illustrate that China's anger towards Japanese war criminals had not dissipated. In one, Zhou has pensively written the word "illegal" in English and underlined it in the margin – a slow contrast to his otherwise massively thick and rapid calligraphy that adorns so many other documents in the archive.

Horror at successive releases of Japanese war criminals provided a prelude to the full fledged anti-American propaganda that would emerge during the height of the Korean War. The memos are important because they cut to the heart of the legacy of Japanese war crimes in China and deepen the rift between China and the United States. Each document stands in opposition to the release of war criminals, first as an "illegal" action taken by the "devil MacArthur," whose order directly contradicts the original sentencing of many of the war criminals being released by dramatically shortening their gaol-time, and secondly as a personal insult and a humiliation to the entire Chinese nation.³⁷ A 1951 memo submitted for Zhou Enlai's approval contends that MacArthur's Order No. 5 interfered with, or even negated, China's "hard won rights through eight years of resistance to Japan."³⁸

The Soviet Union, asserting its prerogative to steer China's international affairs, stressed that MacArthur's decision to release war criminals not only constituted a personal affront to the Chinese, but had become a broader international problem. "The American government," the Soviets argued, "has taken upon itself the great responsibility of MacArthur's release of war criminals, including Shigemitsu Mamoru [Zhongguang Kai 重光凯], whose crimes again disturb international peace."³⁹ MacArthur's release of Shigemitsu certainly grated upon Chinese leaders, but being told how and when to express their outrage by the Soviets was also grating. Foreign Ministry documentation suggests that Soviet involvement in Japanese war crimes issues was contributing to nascent tensions in the Sino-Soviet relationship.

36 Zhou Enlai, *Jianguo yilai zhou enlai wengao (Zhou Enlai's Manuscripts since the Founding of the PRC)*, Vol. 3, July 1950–December 1950 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2008), pp. 544–46.

37 "Yijiuwuyi nian er yue Sulian zhengfu jiu Maikahse feifa shifang Zhong Guangkui deng Riben zhanfan zhi Meiguo zhengfu zhi zhaohui chaojian" ("February 1951 handwritten note from Soviet government to US government regarding MacArthur's illegal release of Shigemitsu Mamoru and other Japanese war criminals"), 15 February 1951, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00022-04; "Sulian zhengfu jiu zhuRi mengjun tongshuai Maikahse nishi fang Zhong Guangkui deng zhanfan gei Meiguo zhengfu zhi zhaohui yiwen yi wo wajiaobao dui cizhi yijian," ("Translated note from Soviet government to American government regarding Supreme Commander for Allied Powers in Japan Douglas MacArthur's intended plan to give free rein to Zhong Guangkui and other Japanese war criminals and our Foreign Ministry's views on this matter"), 12–13 May 1950, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00022-01.

38 "1950 nian wu yue shiwu ri Zhou Enlai Waizhang qianzi MacArthur xuanbu tiqian Zhong Guangkui deng zhan fan de shengming," 15 May 1950, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00022-02.

39 "February 1951 handwritten note from Soviet government to US government regarding MacArthur's illegal release of Shigemitsu Mamoru and other Japanese war criminals."

Condemnations of American policy towards Japanese war criminals represented an instance of Sino-Soviet co-operation and solidarity. However, disagreements over the handling of Japanese war criminals by the Soviet Union also illustrate the beginnings of a fissure between China and its northern patron. In 1950, China corresponded with Soviet Ambassador Roschin in pursuit of the transfer of criminals held by the USSR. The Soviets unquestionably took the lead in these negotiations, controlling the pace and the conditions of their release. In an internal circulation Foreign Ministry document, the compilers noted how former Manchukuo emperor Pu Yi had been turned over to the PRC:

On 18 July, the Chinese and Soviet governments resolved that the Soviets would return 961 Japanese war criminals to us along with the materials for their trials. On 3 August, the Soviet Department of Prisoners of War Management representative Major Keliukov would transfer Puppet Manchukuo Emperor and his high officials [*da chen* 大臣], altogether 85 traitors to be transferred to our Foreign Ministry's representative Comrade Chen Xi. (Detail: This includes the Puppet Manchukuo Emperor Pu Yi and his eight relatives, 13 Puppet Manchukuo cabinet members and other important cabinet officials of Puppet Manchukuo.)⁴⁰

Although the Soviet Union had returned Pu Yi and other Manchukuo prisoners, they failed to convey all relevant files with the prisoners.⁴¹ It soon became clear that the Soviets were intent upon maintaining for themselves the choicest documentary aspects of the Manchukuo legacy.

In 1951, the PRC sought further documentation on the war criminals returned the previous year from the Soviet Union. This time, the request went out secretly to the Soviet Embassy in Beijing, where the Foreign Ministry asked the Soviet Ambassador to “send materials and documents for the basis of prosecution of war criminals of Japanese ancestry and Chinese Puppet-Manchukuo traitors.” After acknowledging the previous transfer of the 971 Japanese war criminals and 65 Manchukuo officials to the PRC (and subsequently the prison at Fushun), the Foreign Ministry thanked the Soviet Ambassador for “including the court records and partial self-circulating documents” for these transferred individuals. Having established that the USSR had engendered goodwill in the PRC via this transfer, the Foreign Ministry went on to request further such documents from the Ambassador, leaning on the Sino-Soviet Alliance (shorthand as “2/15”) for justification.

The PRC clearly wanted full control of the historical legacy of the Japanese war criminals. Stalin had already shown a knack for spontaneously producing – unannounced to the CCP as far as can be ascertained – and prosecuting Japanese war criminals on a global stage, requiring the CCP to mount rapid and extensive domestic propaganda campaigns about Japanese BW atrocities.⁴²

40 “Zhongsu guanxi da shi ji zhi yi (yijiuwuling)” (“Chronicle of Sino-Soviet relations (1950)”), PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 109-01352-02, pp. 2–3.

41 *Ibid.*

42 When the Soviet Union began their unilateral trial of Japanese war criminals in Khabarovsk, Xinhua faithfully published praise for Soviet friendship and repeated in detail the damning testimony of Japanese BW officers; for example, see “Sulian yuandong binghaijun qu junshi fating” (“Soviet Far East Naval District Court”), *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), 28 December 1949, p. 1.

In addition to seizing the initiative, the hunt for documents of Japanese war crimes clearly indicated the CCP's drive for legitimacy and real historical closure. The case of the 1951 request to the USSR for documents indicates again one of the great strengths of the Foreign Ministry Archive, as it reveals that the desire for the documents stemmed not from Mao and Zhou Enlai, but from another segment of the PRC bureaucracy, the Central People's Government Supreme Court.⁴³ At the same time, the sensitivity of the report can be seen in the manner in which the Foreign Ministry handled disclosure of the request to the USSR, telling the Supreme Court that the matter was so secret that the Court could not keep its own record of the matter until it had been resolved with the USSR.⁴⁴

Kept abreast of the issue by Wu Xiuquan 伍修权, whose November 1950 speech to the UN had fairly blazed with anti-Japanese fury, Zhou Enlai tracked the progress of the war criminals and associated documentation carefully. In recapping the series of events that had brought Pu Yi and his cohort back into Chinese hands in July 1950, Wu wrote to Zhou Enlai on 4 November 1951:

At that time, [Soviet] Ambassador Roschin was against publishing the news in the public press, so we didn't persist in our view of wanting to publish the information. Now we see that how we resolved this incident was flawed. After [Vice-Foreign Minister and Head of Asia Section Chen] Jiakang and I discussed it, I think that until today there has been no need to raise the issue, but instead to wait until the appropriate opportunity, at which time we will discuss a response to the matter. Along these lines, we already instructed the Public Security Bureau (*gong'anju* 公安局) to submit a report about the situation after they had received the war criminals.⁴⁵

The 1950 and 1951 co-operation on Japanese war criminals, though dominated by the Soviets, is an essential portion of China's narrative of the Japanese legacy, and it is fortunate that the Foreign Ministry Archive has much material on the matter. Eventually gaining possession of Japanese war criminals and Chinese traitors from the Soviet Union, China then had the ability to hold trials independently. However, it was not until 1956 that the PRC held its own large-scale trials, marking both its independence from Moscow and its desire to place matters of international policy under its own control.

The Shenyang Trials

The 1956 trials of Japanese war criminals in Shenyang (as well as in Taiyuan) represent a new stage in the development of China both internally and internationally.⁴⁶ After Stalin's death, the Chinese government asserted increasing independence in its dealings with Japan, and embarked upon an extensive

43 "Guanyu Sulian yijiao Riben zhanfan de laiwangwendian" ("Telegraph regarding Soviet transfer of Japanese war criminals"), 27 June 1951–30 November 1951, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 118-00151-01, pp. 1, 5.

44 *Ibid.* p. 7.

45 *Ibid.* p. 20.

46 Adam Cathcart and Patricia Nash, "War criminals and the road to Sino-Japanese normalization: Zhou Enlai and the Shenyang Trials, 1954–1956," *Twentieth-century China*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2009), pp. 88–110.

programme of propaganda and “people’s diplomacy” towards Japan.⁴⁷ Japanese prisoners were held at Fushun prison outside the city of Shenyang, where they underwent educational programmes designed both to induce increased understanding and sympathy for the communist revolution and to spur apologies for past crimes.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed these apologies, and hurriedly passed them to Xinhua for publication. Their appeal is relatively obvious, as is the influence of the Fushun prison re-education programme. The apologies, published by Xinhua after receiving approval from the Supreme People’s Court, were personal pleas from war criminals to the Chinese people begging forgiveness. The Japanese authors made no excuses for their individual behaviour, but explained the consuming culture of militarism in which they had been raised – essentially saying that they had trained from childhood to take part in Japan’s construction of empire.⁴⁸ Besides apologizing for past crimes, the authors railed against imperialism, militarism and capitalism, truly epitomizing the reformed prisoner.⁴⁹ Upon their release, some former criminals not only apologized but actually thanked the PRC and the Chinese people for “the magnanimous and extraordinarily humanitarian treatment” they received while incarcerated at Fushun.⁵⁰

Although apologies were published to assuage any doubt of the orthodoxy of releasing Japanese prisoners, the Shenyang trials and the re-education of the Japanese were subject to heavy scrutiny, and occasionally the CCP faced both internal and external criticism for its advocacy of such lenient policies. Some people within the government were uncomfortable with the release of so many Japanese war criminals, even if they had been subject to extensive re-education. After all, only five years had passed since the CCP itself attacked the United States for prematurely releasing Japanese prisoners like Shigemitsu. Interestingly, these criticisms were often posed directly to, and in some ways aimed at, Mao Zedong, who received them and made comments in the margins in broad and elaborate calligraphy. To one transcript of Mao’s discussions with a

47 For more information on the “people’s diplomacy” and the post-Geneva Convention “peace offensive” taken by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, see Keith, *The Diplomacy of Zhou Enlai*, pp. 5–9, 33–36. For an excellent overview of the Japanese side of Sino-Japanese negotiations see Franziska Seraphim, *War Memory and Social Politics in Japan, 1945–2005* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), pp. 108–34.

48 “Zai ya riben zhanfan sixiang qingkuang jianbao” (“A brief report on the Japanese war criminals in custody and thoughts on the situation”), 26 April 1956–17 May 1956, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00502-07.

49 Kogori Ichiro, “Under the tower of treasure: Nosaka Sanzō, Japanese anti-war soldiers, and the Yanan experience,” MA thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1988; Barak Kushner, *The Thought War: Japanese Imperial Propaganda* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), pp. 132–43; for interdisciplinary analysis of re-education and communist legal practices, Phillip F. Williams and Yenna Wu, *The Great Wall of Confinement: The Chinese Prison Camp through Contemporary Fiction and Reportage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

50 “Shifang di yi pi riben zhanfan de qingkuang baogao (bu bao), Fujian: zhanfan xiang zhonghua renmin gongbueguo zhongyang zhengfu guanlisuo dangju de ganxie xing” (“First report on release of Japanese war criminals and their letter of thanks to central government of PRC”), 22 August 1956, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00503-07.

group of visiting Japanese was appended a page-long criticism of Mao's apparently glib manner; the document voiced concern that the Chinese people would not be able so easily to shrug off the impact of Japanese atrocities.⁵¹

Nevertheless, whatever criticisms were levelled against the Shenyang trials and their methods, when they are posed against the Nuremberg trials, Tokyo trials, Nationalist trials of Japanese and the Khabarovsk trials they appeared wholly necessary for the PRC, and public opinion appeared to indicate as much. A brief comment on the trials by a PLA legal office indicated pride in being able finally to try Japanese war criminals; the officers were grateful that China was no longer dependent on international military tribunals or surprise Soviet prosecution of Japanese BW criminals.

In many ways, however, the inherent necessity of the Shenyang trials lay not in the justice gained for crimes committed over ten years earlier, but rather in opening up yet another vein of direct communication between the PRC and the Japanese people. Since the early 1950s, China had been welcoming Japanese cultural delegations and promoting friendship, if not rapprochement, between the two nations. More than simply a play from the "people's diplomacy" handbook, the Shenyang trials and Sino-Japanese negotiations on the fate of war criminals represent an era of independent Chinese foreign policy. In the years between the Geneva Conference and the Great Leap Forward, the Foreign Ministry no longer relied on a continuous exhumation of Japanese war crimes, nor the advice and counsel of the Soviet Union. Foreign Ministry documents from this period reveal both the depth of the sentiment and political utility, and suggest that anti-Japanese feeling was and remains a flexible principle rather than an axiomatic component of Chinese policy.

The period from 1957 to 1960 brought renewed Chinese focus on Japan and recollections of the War of Resistance, stimulated in part by the ascendancy of Kishi Nobusuke, the former Manchukuo economic official and inmate of MacArthur's Sugamo Prison, to the post of Prime Minister in Japan.⁵² The PRC was truly beginning to gain independence from foreign powers in all aspects of its development. However, the documentation in the Foreign Ministry Archive indicates without a doubt that crimes committed almost 20 years in the past never left the minds of Chinese leaders.

Conclusion

Japan's wartime atrocities were not the sole catalyst for mass mobilization in the early years of the PRC, but the role of anti-Japanese rhetoric and legacies of

51 "Mao Zedong zhuxi yu riben waibing tan ribenzhanfan wenti – kexueyuan jianbao ji waijiaobu baogao" ("Chairman Mao Zedong and Japanese foreigners discuss the Japanese war criminal problem – science academy report and Ministry of Foreign Affairs report"), 9–23 November 1956, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 105-00502-05.

52 "Ribei qingbao baogao" ("Japanese intelligence report"), 15 November 1957, PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives, Document 102-00036-06.

the War of Resistance still need to be granted a place in the narrative of the consolidation period. Documentation from the PRC Foreign Ministry Archive illustrates the important role filled by the physical and psychological presence of Japanese war criminals, their trials, and the memory of crimes committed on the mainland. Specifically, the legacies of Japanese wartime atrocities became inextricably linked with the diplomatic and domestic goals of the CCP throughout the period of consolidation. Widespread propaganda filtered through the Foreign Ministry, Health Ministry, military, legal systems and local governments, to be harnessed and released when the international or domestic situation demanded mass mobilization.