

“AGAINST INVISIBLE ENEMIES”: JAPANESE BACTERIOLOGICAL WEAPONS AND CHINA’S COLD WAR, 1949-1950

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Introduction

JAPANESE soldiers and scientists perpetrated horrific war crimes across Asia from 1931-1945, but the investigation of, and trials for, these crimes occurred almost wholly within the politically-charged environment of the Cold War. Just as Cold War tensions colored the prosecution of Nazi war criminals, ideological competition deeply inflected the manner of Allied prosecution of Japanese war crimes.¹ The victorious parties in the World War – the United States, the Soviet Union, and two divergent Chinese regimes – each brought its own particular political needs to the postwar war crimes trials of Japanese defendants. Having swaggered into Tokyo’s undestroyed buildings in September 1945, the American occupation regime used war crimes trials to convince the Japanese people (and skeptical American observers) that only a small clique of militarists had been responsible for the cataclysm of the Pacific War, absenting Emperor Hirohito from culpability.² Not far from the pinnacle of Allied power and the Japanese archipelago, the Soviet Red Army swept hundreds of thousands of Kanto Army officers and soldiers northward and out of Manchuria, hoarding the highest-ranking men to be tried at a more convenient time and using the rest for slave labor.³ In the aftermath of Japan’s surrender, most large trials of Japanese war

¹ Norman J.W. Goda, *Tales from Spandau: Nazi Criminals and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Goda also merits acknowledgement for having spawned the idea for the present article in an Ohio University graduate seminar in 2003.

² Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000); John Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co. / New Press, 1999).

³ William F. Nimmo, *Behind a Curtain of Silence: Japanese in Soviet Custody, 1945-1956* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1988); see also interviews compiled by Thomas Stark, “Soviet Use and Treatment of Japanese PsW,” Douglas MacArthur Memorial Archive, Microfilm Roll 629

criminals remained squarely in the hands of these two big powers. Although the Soviet Union suddenly transferred 971 of these Japanese POWs into Chinese communist custody in July 1950, their prosecution by PRC military courts would have to wait for nearly six years.⁴ The Nationalist Chinese, or Guomindang, began the postwar era with ardent desires to reap political benefits from trials, but ended up rushing through a crucial prosecution of Yasuji Okamura and ceded many more Japanese convicts into American custody in 1949.⁵ In every case, Japanese war criminals, though their crimes had occurred long before 1945, cast shadows into the Cold War and played a key role in the ideological propaganda battles that followed. War crimes trials of the Japanese, thus, bought precious little “closure” to past conflicts.

In part because the postwar trials were so thoroughly saturated with international politics, the issue of bacteriological weapons (BW) crimes remained one of the most controversial and powerful issues of the early Cold War in Asia.⁶ While the press in the communist bloc overtly trumpeted accusations of American-Japanese collusion in BW development, Allied leaders and propagandists sought to tamp down speculation about the legacies of Japanese BW. Bacteriological war crimes therefore represented a highly sensitive and multifaceted postwar problem resistant to any simple solution. As the research head of the BW development group “Unit 731” in Manchuria, where he had triggered rolling waves of plague outbreaks, Ishii Shiro was the ostensible focal point for any investigation. However, for General Douglas MacArthur and the American occupation in Tokyo, the opportunity to learn the results of Japanese experiments on living subjects in Manchuria, and the fear that the Soviets would acquire the results, was worth the price of protecting Ishii from prosecution.⁷

⁴ For in-depth examination of the 1956 trials held in Shenyang and Taiyuan, see Fushun Zhanfan Guanlisuo [Fushun War Criminals Management Center], eds., *Riben Zhanfan de Zai Sheng Zhidi* [Place of New Life of Japanese War Criminals] (Beijing: Wuzhou Chuanbo Chubanshe, 2005); 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* (forthcoming); Takeshi Yoshida, “Brainwashing or Reflection?: The Emergence and Development of War Guilt and Responsibility in Postwar Japan,” unpublished manuscript.

⁵ Philip R. Piccigallo, *The Japanese on Trial: Allied War Crimes Operations in the East, 1945-1951* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 170.

⁶ Sheldon Harris, *Factories of Death, Japanese Biological Warfare, 1932-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2002); David Williams and Peter Wallace, *Unit 731: The Japanese Army's Secret of Secrets*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989); Hal Gold, ed. *Unit 731 Testimony* (North Clarendon: Tuttle Publishing, 1996), 221-222.

⁷ General Headquarters (hereafter GHQ), Far East Command Check Sheet, Note from G-2 to the Legal Section, 17 April 1947, R.G. 331, Box 1434, 20, Case 330, U.S. National Archives; GHQ Far East Command Check Sheet, Note from G-2 to the Legal Section, 9 June 1947, R.G.331, Box 1434, 20, Case 330, U.S. National Archives; see also Tsuneishi Keiichi, translated by John Junkerman, “Unit 731 and the Japanese Imperial Army's

The Soviets also maintained fluency with Japan's BW knowledge, doing so via interrogations of Unit 731 members who had been swept up in the Soviet drive through China's Northeast. The Soviets spent about four years interrogating these men, and ultimately tried a handful in Khabarovsk, the military and administrative center of the Russian Far East. The December 1949 prosecutions of twelve Japanese complicit with BW development would shake Chinese observers and add momentum to the forthcoming Sino-Soviet alliance, a connection which this article addresses in-depth.

For their part, Jiang Jieshi and the Nanjing government had mounted limited prosecutions of Japanese scientists in 1946, and provincial health departments in the Guomintang heartland of Zhejiang were actively researching the ongoing effects of Japanese BW on local populations.⁸ However, Jiang's deep reliance on American aid and the inchoate nature of the Chinese civil war meant that even if he had known about Ishii Shiro's activity – and given the profusion of Chinese Communist propaganda about the man after 1949, it hardly seems possible he could have been ignorant – Jiang eschewed any call for the Japanese scientist's prosecution.⁹

Great-power dependency also impacted the CCP's response to revelation of Japanese BW research. Following the Soviet lead in 1949, the CCP called for the immediate prosecution of Ishii Shiro and Emperor Hirohito for BW crimes. While the CCP had already proven its anti-Japanese *bona fides* to the Chinese people, this particular campaign of criticism leveled at the highest levels of the Japanese state was not initiated by the CCP. Instead, at a time of great sensitivity in the early months of the PRC, while Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai were in

Biological Warfare Program," <http://japanfocus.org/products/details/2194> (accessed 24 October 2006).

⁸ In 1946, the Guomintang had tried fourteen Japanese servicemen affiliated with BW units in Nanjing, futilely forwarding the indictments to the international court at Tokyo. See Jing-Bao Nie, "The West's Dismissal of the Khabarovsk Trial as 'Communist Propaganda': Ideology, Evidence and International Bioethics," *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (April 2004): 38. For GMD provincial investigations, see Williams and Wallace, *Unit 731*, 95-101; Harris, *Factories of Death*, 110. One of the Chinese doctors involved in the original investigation of plague outbreaks in Changde in 1941 presented his report to an International Scientific Commission in 1952 during investigations on American BW use; the report was subsequently incorporated into *Report of the International Scientific Commission for the Investigation of the Facts Concerning Bacterial Warfare in Korea and China*. (Peking, 1952), Appendix K. This larger report mentions Jiang Jieshi's complicity in Japanese BW, but, because of its use as propaganda during the 1952 campaign, calls the authenticity of the accusations into doubt. See Patricia Nash, "Plague and Propaganda: The Significance of Biological Weapons Allegations in the Korean War," *Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal* 33 (Spring 2008): 93-114.

⁹ Feng Quanpu, "Guomintang zhengquan dui Ri zhengce fenxi (1949-1952) [Analysis of the Guomintang Regime's Japan Policy, 1949-1952]," Ph.D. dissertation, Beijing University, May 2006.

Moscow carrying out negotiations, the CCP was forced by Soviet action to trumpet the BW issue domestically, stoking anti-Japanese sentiment in the interests of Soviet friendship.¹⁰ For all of the postwar powers in East Asia, Cold War imperatives seemingly overtook the need for objective pursuit of historical truth, fracturing any notion of consensus on the prosecution of BW criminals.

New documents from the Foreign Ministry Archive of the PRC now allow for a more complete reassessment of the postwar Chinese communist attitude toward Japanese bacteriological warfare crimes. Reading of these archives, along with simple examination of newspapers from the period and the newly published manuscripts of several major Chinese participants, indicate the scale of CCP activism toward the BW issue in the early years of the PRC. They also temper the edges of arguments made by scholars who assert CCP "silence....over Japanese BW crimes" in the 1950s¹¹ The lack of comprehensive attention granted to the place of the Khabarovsk trials within the PRC's discourse on biological weapons led even Sheldon Harris to clutter his otherwise classic text *Factories of Death*, with the completely wrong assertion that "neither Mao nor any his spokespersons raised the issue of prosecuting BW experts."¹² In fact, the Chinese Communist Party was anything but silent in the early years of the PRC regarding the investigation and denunciation of Japanese BW crimes.

The Khabarovsk trials triggered a vocal public campaign in China which was heightened by Soviet demands that Hirohito be prosecuted for war crimes. These information campaigns in late 1949 and early 1950 were accompanied by extensive internal mobilization of Central and Provincial ministries to collect evidence of BW crimes and prevent further attacks and outbreaks. That various branches of the new Chinese government, including many former Guomindang officials, earnestly sought evidence of Japanese war crimes showed that, ultimately, the BW issue would lose its linkage to pro-Soviet mobilization. The documents now bring us to a crucial moment in the evolution of anti-Japanese

¹⁰ For solid assessments of the overall Sino-Soviet relationship in this period, see Dieter Heinzig, *The Soviet Union and Communist China 1945-1950: The Arduous Road to the Alliance* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2004); Shen Zhihua, *Sidalin, Mao Zedong yu Chaoxian Zhanzheng* (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2003); Yang Kuisong, *Mao Zedong yu Mosike de En En Yuan Yuan* (Nanning: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1999); Yang Kuisong, "The Sino-Soviet Alliance and Nationalism: A Contradiction," *Social Sciences in China* Vol. XXVI, No. 2 (Summer 2005): 86-99.

¹¹ Jing-Bao Nie, "The United States Cover-up of Japanese Wartime Medical Atrocities: Complicity Committed in the National Interest and Two Proposals for Contemporary Action," *The American Journal of Bioethics* Vol. 6 No. 3 (2006): W21-W33. Nie's own bibliography indicates that the CCP took interest in BW crimes also in 1961, when the Party authorized Chunzhong Chubanshe to publish a translation from the Japanese of Akiyama's *Tokushu Butai 731* (Special Unit 731), (Kyoto: Sanichi Shobo, 1956).

¹² Harris, *Factories of Death*, 315-317. For his assessment of the Khabarovsk trials, see *ibid*, 317-321.

sentiment in China, a moment that unfolds within one of the most richly studied and vital events of the early PRC: the negotiations for the Sino-Soviet Alliance.

The Khabarovsk Trials and the Sino-Soviet Alliance

IN late 1949, the issue of Japanese war crimes appeared to be quite distant from the minds of the CCP central leadership. Mao was in Moscow negotiating with Stalin, preoccupied with resolving issues of Soviet naval bases in Dalian and Soviet control of the Changchun railway, along with giant loans and security guarantees. Certainly many of the issues, particularly those involving rights in Northeast China, had unwanted resonance with Japan's previously successful empire building in China, and the security guarantees would eventually mention aggression from Japan specifically. However, while Japan was referred to at many points in the negotiations, the issue of war criminals never arose as an extended focus of conversations with Soviet leaders.¹³ None of the three principal Chinese leaders involved in Soviet affairs—Mao Zedong, Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai, and Liu Shaoqi, the last running the government in Beijing—appeared to initiate talks with the Soviets in pursuing the question of Japanese war crimes at that moment. And in the broader context of trials of Japanese for war crimes, why would the CCP had been interested in any case? The Tokyo Trials had been concluded for nearly a year, and Mao had already covered his anti-Japanese flank by laying down withering opprobrium in January 1949 against the Guomintang mistrial of Japanese General Yasuji Okamura.¹⁴ While the postwar Chinese public was axiomatically vigilant toward Japan's industrial and military revival, the idea of embarking on war crimes trials at such a moment for the PRC seems highly unlikely. The CCP was in the process of solidifying power at home, and the legacy of Japanese war crimes that they inherited was scattered to say the least. Much of the documentation on Japanese war crimes remained in the custody of the Soviet Union, and even questions as straightforward as which Japanese POWs should be indicted had been left unresolved.

It was therefore somewhat surprising when, in the waning days of December 1949, during the midst of negotiation with the Chinese People's Republic, the Soviets undertook a unilateral six day trial of Japanese POWs in the Soviet Union. On December 24, 1949, a Soviet military court in the Far Eastern border city of Khabarovsk indicted twelve members of Japanese BW units who had been stationed in China during the Second World War. All of the defendants pled guilty to assisting in, or maintaining knowledge of, the Japanese BW program. Clocking in at four days, the trials were relatively brief in duration — certainly if

¹³ Sergey Radchenko and David Wolff, "To the Summit via Proxy-Summits: New Evidence from Soviet and Chinese Archives on Mao's Long March to Moscow," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* Vol. 16, 105-183.

¹⁴ Mao Zedong, "On Arresting Okamura and Guomintang Civil War Criminals," January 1949, *Selected Works* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1978), Vol. IV, 327.

measured against the glacially slow three year Tokyo trials—and, although the sentences were relatively lenient by Soviet standards, the verdicts were nevertheless trumpeted as a well-justified work of justice upon Japanese militarism¹⁵ Prosecutors emphasized that the Japanese had tested BW on prisoners, mostly Chinese, while preparing for full-scale bacteriological warfare against the people of China and the Soviet Union.¹⁶ While neither Ishii Shiro nor Emperor Hirohito were indicted *in absentia*, prosecutors at Khabarovsk made insistent connections between these individuals, claiming that they held responsibility for the BW crimes perpetrated against the Chinese since the early 1930s. These assertions allowed the Soviets to exploit a perceived weakness in U.S. East Asian policy by conjointly attacking the self-serving policy of the U.S. occupation of protecting Hirohito and ignoring the Japanese BW crimes. The tactic also was meant to demonstrate Sino-Soviet friendship by pointing an accusing finger at those who participated in or maintained complacency toward Japanese atrocities in China.¹⁷

On December 29, 1949, CCP media outlets broke the news of the Soviet military tribunal in Khabarovsk, and the news dominated Chinese newspapers for two or three days thereafter. The front page of the *Lü Da Ribao* (Lüshun & Dalian Daily) on December 30, 1949 ran long articles about the Khabarovsk trials. The main editorial, below the fold, was absolutely immense—providing much valuable material for cadre to study.¹⁸ All of the papers provided reprints of

¹⁵ *Trial Documents on Accusations Against Former Japanese Servicemen for Preparation and Use of Bacteriological Weapons* (Moscow: Foreign Language Press, 1950). The Japanese defendants received sentences of seven to twenty-five years; most were released in 1956 as part of the USSR's diplomatic normalization of relations with Japan. For a stunning analysis of Soviet archives showing how, in fact, a seven-year-sentence would have been considered quite light in the increasingly punitive postwar legal climate in the USSR, see Nicholas Werth, *Le terreur et le désespoir: Stalin et son système* [The Terror and the Disarray: Stalin and His System] (Paris: Perrin, 2007), 408.

¹⁶ "Japan Said to Test Bacteriological Warfare on GI's," *New York Times*, December 27, 1949.

¹⁷ For discussion of how the Khabarovsk trials also defended the Soviets against increasingly embarrassing U.S. and Japanese accusations of lugubrious repatriation of Japanese from the Soviet Far East, see William Joseph Sebald with Russell Brines, *With MacArthur in Japan: A Personal History of the Occupation* (London: The Cresset Press, 1965). It is also possible that the Soviet Union was trying to reclaim the mantle of moral superiority from the United States in the wake of the September 23, 1949 announcement that the USSR had tested an atomic weapon. See Raymond Aron, "La Fin du Monopole Atomique (The End of the Atomic Monopoly)," *Le Figaro*, October 3, 1949, reprinted in Raymond Aron, *Les articles de politique internationale dans Le Figaro de 1947 à 1977; tome premier: La guerre froide (juin 1947 à mai 1955)* (Articles on International Politics in *Le Figaro* from 1947 to 1977; Volume 1, The Cold War [June 1947-May 1955]), (Paris: Edition de Fallois, 1990), 289-292.

¹⁸ *Lü Da Ribao*, December 30, 1949.

Renmin Ribao (People's Daily), as few editors at local papers would have had the time or the gumption to compose a complex argument about such a delicate international issue, at least not without the commentary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The lack of any editorials or relating articles of local origin from a single regional paper in Northeast China shows the rapidity with which the order came down to publish the news. It also indicates, quite correctly, a lack of prior coordination between Soviet and Chinese foreign ministry on publicizing the issue. The MFA Archive is completely absent of any files indicating knowledge of the Khabarovsk action prior to its public announcement, much less behind-the-scenes Sino-Soviet discussion about how to coordinate the campaign that followed at the Soviet impetus.

The Khabarovsk trials took place in the context of a mounting propaganda war for Chinese public opinion. Newspaper editors, many of them holdovers from the era of Guomindang control, were leavening newspapers and journals with ever-more numinous articles translated from the Soviet press. Moscow's TASS coverage of the Khabarovsk trials flowed readily into Chinese media outlets both because the Soviets demanded it and CCP wanted to appear accommodating to the Soviets at a sensitive moment.¹⁹ Thus, when the Soviets undertook to publicize the positive aspects of the Khabarovsk trials, it was expected that the Chinese media would partake in and support the campaign.²⁰ At the same time, news from Khabarovsk allowed the CCP to frame the Soviet Union as a staunchly anti-Japanese ally, swaying thereby the urban "middle forces" in China who had supported the ouster of the Guomindang but who still questioned the efficacy and the pro-Soviet internationalism of CCP governance.

Initial CCP press coverage of the Khabarovsk trials mirrored precisely the themes laid out by the Soviet precedent. Emphasizing Hirohito's culpability,

¹⁹ To Malenkov, Liu Shaoqi noted the CCP's desire to set up "Russian language international propaganda broadcasting" in Shanghai and Beijing, and beseeched Soviet help with this venture. Liu also expressed a desire for help setting up "English language comrades" (*yingwen de tongzhi*) for establishing overseas propaganda capability. As for Soviet film specialists, these would come to China at Stalin's suggestion. See Liu Shaoqi, "Guanyu pingqing Sulian xinwen zhuanjia wenti de xin" [Letter to Malenkov Concerning the Problem of Inviting News Specialists from the Soviet Union], August 2, 1949, *Liu Shaoqi Wengao* [The Manuscripts and Papers of Liu Shaoqi], ed. Bian Yanjun (Beijing: zhongyuan wenxian chubanshe, 2005) vol. 1, 42-43; Liu Shaoqi, "Guanyu Sulian dianying sheyingdui dao Zhongguo gongzuo wenti de dianbao" [Telegraph to CCP Central Committee Concerning the Problem of Soviet Film and Photography Crews Coming to Work in China], August 12, 1949, *ibid.*, vol. 1, 49; CCP Central Committee to East China Bureau, revised by Liu Shaoqi, "Zhongyang jishao dianying sheyingdui dao Dongbei diqu gongzuo de dianbao" [Telegraph Regarding Work of Film and Photography Crews in East China Areas], November 2, 1949, *ibid.*, vol. 1, 134..

²⁰ Jing-Bao Nie, "The West's Dismissal of the Khabarovsk Trial as 'Communist Propaganda': Ideology, Evidence and International Bioethics," *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 1, no. 1 (April 2004): 32-42.

Xinhua dispatches broadened the definition of Japanese war crimes to expand beyond Northeast China to discussion of the harm Japan had caused to the Soviet people. Here the Khabarovsk trials served a dual purpose: the Soviets were exacting justice upon the Japanese, and the trial could put to rest the notion that the Soviets had permitted Japan to run wild in China in the 1930s without tendering any sacrifices of their own. More pragmatically, such rhetoric lent to the theme of a natural alliance against Japan and the United States based on the mutual suffering at the hands of the Japanese and equal threat in the face of what was becoming a *de facto* US-Japanese military alliance.

A front-page article in the *Shenyang Ribao* (Shenyang Daily) on December 29 hearkened back to the establishment of Unit 731, the most infamous of the Japanese BW units, noting new revelations about this unit at the Khabarovsk Trials. Unit 731 had operated under the direction not only of Lt. Ishii Shiro, the article asserted, but of Emperor Hirohito. The article, subtitled "Defendant Admits Using BW," went on to outline in detail Japan's BW facilities in Manchuria. One passage described an underground jail populated by "Chinese patriots and Soviet people into whom the Japanese injected chemical weapons," portraying the USSR as an equal victim of Japan's depravity.²¹ Subsequent articles emphasized mutual Sino-Soviet suffering from Japan's BW program, citing the 1939 Soviet-Japanese border battle of Nomonhan.²² The *Shenyang Ribao* later used the trials as a springboard for discussion of Japan's bacteriological war crimes beyond the northeast, extending analysis to Japanese-initiated plague outbreaks in Guangzhou and Nanjing in the early 1940s. The articles served not only a historical purpose, but criticized the omission of these facts from the Tokyo Trials, all the while praising the Khabarovsk prosecution as a vigorous counterfoil to American judicial inaction.²³

The MFA accelerated its exchange of documents with Xinhua in Beijing, funneling newsworthy items and bacteriological weapons charges to the news agency for publication. The Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Health each siphoned documents to Xinhua, and it appears that after the Soviet declaration of December 29, the news agency took real interest in promoting the atrocities of Japanese BW research in mainland China. Thus, at the very outset of the 1950s, on New Year's Day, Chinese newspaper readers were greeted by no fewer than three articles on Japanese bacteriological warfare. The first was a translated *Pravda* piece on the trials clearly intended to stir anti-Japanese nationalism; two

²¹ "Soviet Union Military Trial of Japanese War Criminals," *Shenyang Ribao* [Shenyang Daily], December 29, 1949, 1 [emphasis added].

²² "Soviet Coastal Military Region Military Court Continues Prosecution of Japanese Biological War Criminals: Shantian Qisan [山田乞三] Admits the Production of Biological Weapons for the Purpose of Waging War Against the USSR, Mongolia, and China," *Shenyang Ribao* [Shenyang Daily], December 30, 1949, 1.

²³ "Soviet Court Continues Prosecution of Japanese Biological War Criminals," *Shenyang Ribao* [Shenyang Daily], December 31, 1949, 1.

accompanying articles discussed the views of Soviet as well as French experts who asserted that while some Japanese were receiving justice in Khabarovsk, America was recalcitrant to bring charges against Japanese war criminals under its control.²⁴

On January 7, 1950, scientists convened in Lüshun for a meeting on the theme of BW, and to voice their support for the Soviet position against both imperialism and bacteriological weapons atrocities. In urging China to sign an alliance with the Soviet Union, the scientists were hardly unique. However, the resultant editorial from the scientists' meeting is worth noting for its unusual interpretation of the Japanese BW crimes. Penned by Li Shiliang 李士亮 and entitled "Imperialism is Itself an Atrocity" (帝国主义就是罪恶), the essay reminded readers "how American imperialists tried to take over everything, economically and otherwise in China, Vietnam, and other places, massacring millions." Impugning some of the U.S. technologies that had helped to defeat Japan in 1945, the editorial continued: "The Americans made the atomic bomb and they made bacteriological weapons and chemical weapons to massacre even more people." Turning American technological superiority to the advantage of the CCP, the scientists interpreted BW research as of a piece with the atomic bomb, a pairing that also played to the ambivalence to the United States by the tens of thousands of Japanese still living in Dalian. The editorial also showed how in their impetus to publicize the Khabarovsk trials, the Soviets and the CCP further stoked a sense of Chinese victimhood:

The Chinese people are the worst victims of fascism's crimes and we must, therefore, increase our spirit of vigilance.... First we must increase defense against bandit agents' work, because bacteriological weapons are not possible to see with one's eyes. Bacteriological weapons represent an incomprehensible type of warfare; these are weapons that can be used at any time (平时). We must spare nothing in the defense against BW.

To do this we must use every available method. Through a series of movements, we must make books, newspapers, radio broadcasts, movies, folk performances, songs, opera, etc., telling the masses about science work and how to protect themselves against common diseases and the deadly crimes of the bandits. We must use science thusly to serve the whole people's production, pooling our talents together as one to increase national defense.

²⁴ "Boli xu shenxun Ri xijun zhanfan; Su Fa yizhuanjia weiyuanhui fabiao yijian; tongsu Ri zhanfan weifan kexue de zuixing" [Khabarovsk Continues Trials of Japanese BW War Criminals; Committee of Soviet and French Medical Experts Publishes Its Views; Condemnations of the Criminal Scientific Atrocities of Japanese War Criminals] *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], January 1, 1950.

Finally and yet most importantly, we need more and ever-increasingly to let the Soviet Union lead the peaceful democratic people of the world in unity and cooperation. Soviet power will protect us from those who love war and prevent agents [of imperialism] from freely carrying out their incendiary and illegal atrocities. Proof of this idea can be seen in the first-ever decision of a court to try the Japanese scientists [in Khabarovsk] who are the bacteriological warfare war criminals for their especially big crimes dating from years back.

In spite of all of this, scientists may yet exist who will continue to aid imperialism by gathering research to create whose purpose is to inflict death on a massive scale. We don't understand the ways of these horrific killers and running dogs who remain free to carry out such behavior, nor do we understand their spirit of running amok to commit atrocities. Therefore we must use the spirit of the [Khabarovsk] trials to conduct propaganda, using the best methods as scientists to educate, drill, and bring our knowledge to the people. This is the kind of work we can carry out.²⁵

A number of important themes shine through in this editorial. The article clearly shows the convergence of the BW trial with the By hinting at the possible role of "bandit agents" in possibly returning to spread bacteriological agents in China, the rhetoric anticipates the paranoia of the coming campaigns against counter-revolutionaries, while also prefiguring the later patriotic hygiene campaigns of 1952.²⁶ Most importantly, the editorial's emphasis on the lessons of the BW revelations should be noted. According to the authors, Soviet leadership alone could protect China from militarists abroad and keep China safe from further crimes of Japanese science. What went unspoken here was the inability of the PRC as it was presently configured to assure the guarantee of security against a Japanese revival, in what was effectively a litmus test for any modern Chinese regime.

Just as the Lüshun scientists urged each other to overflow the common methods of editorial writing into the arts of agitation, so too did the CCP seek to bring the BW issue forward to the whole population via the abundant publication of cartoons. In framing public discourse on BW crimes, Chinese cartoons played a role that was perhaps as important as the published discussions of experts and articles, conveying a biting message directed at both literate elites and semi-

²⁵ Li Shiliang, "Diguozhuyi jiu shi zu'e," ["Imperialism is Itself an Atrocity"] *Lü Da Ribao* [*Lüshun-Dalian Daily*], January 8, 1950.

²⁶ Bai Xi, *Kaiguo Dazhenfan* [Great Repression of Counter-Revolutionaries at the Founding of the Nation], (Beijing: Dangxiao Chubanshe, 2007); Ruth Rogaski, "Nature, Annihilation, and Modernity: China's Korean War Germ-Warfare Experience Reconsidered," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (May 2002): 386-390.

literate citizens. Like the printed articles, cartoons on the Japanese threat conveyed the importance of the Khabarovsk trials, but articulated CCP policy terms that were more basic and unmistakable: the Soviet Union was tough on Japanese bacteriological warfare, while the United States was resurrecting Japanese militarism. Cartoonists frequently paired negative images of the Japanese with depictions of stern Soviet judges, familiarizing viewers with the benefits of Soviet alliance. Similarly, Japanese were also juxtaposed with their big-nosed American masters. On January 8, 1950, the *Renmin Ribao* published one such cartoon by the popular artist Hua Junwu concerning both of the major powers of the Cold War and their differing attitudes toward Japanese BW crimes [Figure 1].

In the top panel, Hua Junwu depicts the Khabarovsk trials, where a judge, “the Soviet Union,” holds a paper decreeing “Verdicts Ready for Japanese Bacteriological Weapons War Criminals, Khabarovsk Region: Go to Labor Camp for 25 Years and 18 Years of Imprisonment.” Friendship with the USSR was thus depicted as a means of satisfying the Chinese need to see Japan humbled. Hua had had years of practice caricaturing Japanese soldiers, and had scored many successes in his depictions of American imperialist troops, resulting in his work being reprinted in Pyongyang. However, his drawing of Soviet friends in Figure 1 indicates that he lacked experience in depicting Russians and was seeking for a method appropriate to the new relationship. While the Soviet judge in Figure 1 remains somewhat elusive, the Japanese are depicted clearly enough, all humbled by their manifest errors. Contrasting with the moral clarity of Khabarovsk, the bottom panel depicts an “American Occupation Office,” where a large “American Imperialist” to look down proudly at the “Hidden Japanese Bacteriological War Criminal Takenori.”²⁷ Smoke issues from the American’s pipe (positioned at his wrist), either a reference to Douglas MacArthur or an inference of the past clouds of chemical agents released in China by the Japanese. The “American Imperialist,” naturally, is gratified at the obedience of his diminutive Japanese assistant. In both top and bottom panels, we note that the Japanese remain clad in Kanto army uniforms, indicating their inherent ties to militarism, and MacArthur’s acceptance of Japanese militarism representing a potential future threat to China. Although depictions of Japanese war criminals, even the general Okamura Yasuji, rarely featured names, this cartoon did. Perhaps Hua Junwu intended for literate readers to be attuned to a pun contained in the caption: Takenori’s first name, when rendered into Chinese (Si Lang 四郎), is homophonous with *se lang* 色狼, or “sex wolf.”

As news of the Khabarovsk trials faded into background with the coming of the New Year, the Chinese news media moved forward with several stories that unhooked Soviet trials from Japanese atrocities and focused more purely on the latter topic. The coordination between the Foreign Ministry and the Xinhua grew

larger in early January 1950, when Japanese atrocities took on greater prevalence in the press. Some of the articles stemmed from reader responses to the articles about Khabarovsk, showing the unintended consequences of the Soviets pushing the topic of Japanese BW to the front of the Chinese public debate. One reader's



Figure 1. Hua Junwu, "An Obvious Contrast," *Renmin Ribao*, January 8, 1950.

letter came as a response to *Xinhua Ribao's* (*Xinhua Daily*) articles of December 31, 1949. On January 12, the reader offered his critiques to local officials:

To the responsible comrade in the Beijing City People's Government:

I saw the fourth version of the article printed in the *Xinhua Ribao* on the last day of '49 regarding "Japanese War Criminals Preparations For and Guilty

Use of Bacteriological Weapons.” This article included the phrase “using bacteriological weapons during the war against China,” a short way of saying that many Japanese war criminals in China released bacteriological agents. I know this, however I assert that casualties are still happening that should be attributed to such weapons.

There is a “blood inhaling insect” bacteria [e.g., malaria]. This bacteria is in water. When I was in Zhenjiang Beigushan (at Tianlu Temple), many people adjacent to the Yangtze River got this sickness. According to the local people’s discussion, this disease was released at the time when Japanese people were in China, and it has been preserved until now. Then after I recovered from the sickness in Suzhou Panmenli’s Hebin, there was something written: “This water contains “malaria bugs” released by the Japanese; do not use this water.” Ah! There are still many such testimonies of Japanese releasing bacteriological weapons in China! Please responsible comrades, could you not inform the government of this?²⁸

While the letter appears relatively elementary, and does not appear to have spurred detailed investigations, it was useful for propaganda purposes.

That the CCP considered reprinting this letter indicates that the government thought that basic education to the Chinese public about the BW crimes of Japan was still needed. The notions of mass involvement and the value of individual testimonies were further highlighted. However, at its core, the letter shows how BW-related items, indeed anything that validated the strategy, were published immediately and with some urgency at that time.²⁹ The apparent lack of large numbers of similar documents predating the Khabarovsk trials contrasted greatly with the glut of documents that followed the trials, ranging from BW investigations, speculations, and denunciations. These indicate that, apart from of the areas of the Northeast, public agitation on these issues was mostly new at the time. The short citizen letter above drifted to the top of China’s foreign affairs bureaucracy, receiving attention from Zhou Enlai’s office, and subsequently Zhang Hanfu and Hu Qiaomu. Zhang Hanfu indicated that the letter should be

²⁸ Liu Dong, “Liu Dong gei Xinhua Ribao fuze tongzhi de xin” [Letter from Liu Dong to the Responsible Comrade at Xinhua Ribao / Regarding Xinhua Ribao’s Handling of the Handwritten Letter to Our Foreign Affairs Ministry About Japanese War Criminals Spreading Biological Weapons in Our Country Which We Hope to Publish] Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*hereafter* MFA) Archive, 105-00076-02, 3-5.

²⁹ Not incidentally, this often inaccurate type of citizen testimony is precisely what helped to push forward the 1952 campaign and led to serious inaccuracies of assessment of U.S. BW use. See Patricia Nash, “Plague and Propaganda,” 105; see also Rogaski, 381-415.

shared with news agencies in Nanjing in particular, while the Asia Office of the MFA directed Xinhua to publish the piece immediately.³⁰

On January 19, seeking material to keep the campaign going, the MFA asked Xinhua expressly to publish the citizen's letter about the insects.³¹ The same day, the Foreign Ministry noted its receipt of BW-related documents from *Nanjing Ribao* (*Nanjing Daily*) which they held in reserve for publication.³² Hu Qiaomu's commentary on the letter is particularly telling. In one of the very few pieces of evidence revealing Hu's hand in the vast MFA correspondence, Hu states that the note should "be kept by our department for further use in the future."³³ Hu Qiaomu's involvement in the process shows that the BW issue, specifically the manner in which it should be publicized and the degree to which to involve the masses, was granted the highest levels of internal attention in Zhongnanhai. The Foreign Ministry in Beijing closely tabulated and traced the publication of articles and media pieces about the BW campaign.

The Northeast Connection

SOME ministries in the CCP bureaucracy were more ready than others to spring upon this news and expand upon it. In Northeast China (Dongbei), the regional government had already been collecting evidence of Japan's crimes, and was better equipped to begin publicizing the Khabarovsk trials. As the area of China longest consolidated under CCP rule (as Yanan had been evacuated in 1947), the Northeast naturally led the way on the BW question.³⁴

³⁰ "Zhou Enlai bangongshi, Zhang Hanfu, Hu Qiaomu he Waijiaobu yazhouju de pishi" [Notes/marginalia by Zhou Enlai's Office, Zhang Hanfu, Hu Qiaomu and Asian Department of Foreign Ministry], MFA Archive, 105-00076-02, 6-7. .

³¹ "Waijiaobu zhi Xinhua ribao shehui fuwushi fuze tongzhi de xin" [Note from Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Responsible Comrade at Xinhua Ribao], MFA Archive, 105-00076-02, 8.

³² "Zhou Enlai bangongshi, Zhang Hanfu, Hu Qiaomu he Waijiaobu yazhouju de pishi" [Notes/marginalia by Zhou Enlai's Office, Zhang Hanfu, Hu Qiaomu and Asian Department of Foreign Ministry], MFA Archive, 105-00076-02.

³³ Hu's ubiquity in the early years of the PRC is belied by his absence in the archives, where a search for his name in titles of documents turns up exactly zero documents. Perhaps the guardians of this canonical leader's documents are hoarding his personal archives in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, where Hu ended his active executive career? For published materials and detailed discussion of his written interactions with Mao, see Hu Qiaomu, *Hu Qiaomu Wenji* [Selected Works of Hu Qiaomu], Vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1992); Hu Qiaomu, *Hu Qiaomu Shuxinji* [Selected Letters of Hu Qiaomu] (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2002)..

³⁴ On CCP consolidation in the Northeast, see Robert Levine, *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Victory in Manchuria, 1945-1948* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

One of the foremost publishers of material was the Northeast People's Government Department of Public Health. This department had been involved in plague prevention quite heavily since 1946, when a major outbreak had occurred near Pingfan. In 1950, they published a number of exposes on Takenori, as well as more entertaining short stories on the themes of BW, stories aimed at a younger demographic.³⁵ Specific accounts of Unit 731 and the activities of Ishii Shiro, who for once was referred to more than Hirohito or Okamura Yasuji, filled papers in Northeast China and were printed as pamphlets.³⁶ In Harbin, the Weishengbu published an 80-page pamphlet whose humorous title page -- a cartoon image of a portly MacArthur spiriting away a toxic baby representing Unit 731 war criminals and Hirohito -- belied the utter seriousness of the contents. This large collection of research materials on the BW problem was issued rapidly, indicating the comprehensive research done on Unit 731 in Harbin and that city's leading position in promoting justice for the crimes. Within this pamphlet were a large amount of evidence about the five individuals who were currently in Japan who they wished to try, along with extensive sections dedicated to the Khabarovsk evidence.³⁷

On February 5, 1950, the *Renmin Ribao* ran a huge headline stating: "The Soviet Government Presents a Note to Our Government Suggesting the Establishment of a Special International Military Court to Prosecute Bacteriological War Criminal Hirohito."³⁸ The newspaper went on to give evidence of the chemical weapons facilities and testimonials that the Japanese had use aircraft to spread pests over China's southern areas. Such headlines, focusing on areas remote from China's northeast, not only indicated that the Japanese bacteriological weapons program had spread far beyond Manchuria, but represented the CCP drive to mobilize the entire nation around the problems of the Northeast. Moreover, the use of the BW issue more than six weeks after the conclusion of the Khabarovsk trials clearly showed Soviet awareness of the potency of the BW issue within the struggle for Chinese public opinion. And again, the initiation of this news was Soviet, not Chinese.

³⁵ On anti-Soviet sentiment among Chinese youth, see Strategic Services Unit, Mukden [Shenyang], April 11, 1946, document no. A-67094, "Student Demonstrations in Mukden," National Archives Microfilm Publication M1656, roll 1; Strategic Services Unit Intelligence Reports, 1945-1946; Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226; Archives II Research Room Services Branch, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland.

³⁶ Dongbei Renmin Zhengfu Weishengbu [Northeast People's Government Ministry of Health] "Guanyu souji Riben xijun zhanfan zuixing de cailiao" [Regarding the Collection of Japanese BW Atrocities Materials], MFA Archives, 105-00076-02, 80.

³⁷ "Rimo qisanyaodui xijun zhanfan de zuixing ziliao" [Evidence Materials of Unit 731 Bacteriological Weapons Atrocities], February 1, 1950, MFA Archives, 105-00076-03, 10-24, 26, 35, 40-55.

³⁸ "Sulian zhengfu zhi woguo zhengfu zhaohui; tiyi she guoji tebie junshi fating; shenpan Yuren deng Riben xijun zhanfan," *Renmin Ribao*, February 5, 1950.

A survey of Xinhua publications reveal the narrative taken by the CCP in regards to Japanese BW crimes and remain an important means of gauging the desired public reaction to the Soviet trials. However, analysis of recently released inner-Party documents are now beginning to allow for confirmation of motives behind the publication and a deeper understanding of the backroom politics involved with the issue. As the pace of negotiations and drafts accelerated in Moscow, so too did inner-Party debate, negotiation, and correspondence about the BW issue. As the signing of the alliance neared, a marked increase therefore occurred in public communications regarding the dangers from Japan. On February 6, Liu Shaoqi, spent a little more than half an hour at the Soviet embassy in Beijing dealing in most explicit fashion with the Soviets on the war criminal issue. As relayed by the Soviet Ambassador to his government, Liu said:

1) The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China supports the Soviet government's suggestion that Emperor Hirohito be handed over to an international military criminal court. The [publication of the] note is already arousing the whole society to support the proposal.

Liu Shaoqi said that he has already instructed Vice Foreign Minister Li Kenong to draft a reply on behalf of the Central Government to support the Soviet government's note. The Central Government itself intends to present this note to the Soviet Union and British governments. Owing to the lack of recognition of the PRC by the American and French governments, we intend to have the note passed to these governments via the British. *Liu Shaoqi asked for my help with the drafting of the [PRC] Foreign Ministry's response to the note, because the Chinese Foreign Ministry lacks sufficient experience, and they have not studied or drafted analogous documents* [emphasis added].³⁹

It appears difficult to believe that, with the Party's long experience in decrying Japanese militarism along with all the self-assurance flowing out of Beijing at this time, that the Chinese Communist Party could credibly assert that they lacked the experience to draft a memorandum about Japanese war crimes. However, it appears that Liu deferred to the Soviets completely in this matter. His assertion that the masses were already mobilized to support the directive is likely correct.

³⁹ "Regarding the Matter of Arrangements for a Chinese Communist Delegation to Visit the Soviet Union and a Memorandum of Talks with Liu Shaoqi," February 6, 1950, ABIIPФ [Russian Presidential Archive], ф.0100, оп.43, п.302, д.10, л.60-61. Appreciation is extended to Beijing University professors Kim Donggil and Shen Zhihua for sharing this source.

In connection with Liu Shaoqi's meeting, Zhou Enlai sent a telegram from Moscow to Liu Shaoqi on February 6, 1950, representing Mao's views on the jailing and prosecution of Japanese BW criminals. It reads:

On February 1, Soviet embassies in Washington, London, and Beijing transmitted a letter to the three respective governments of the United States, Britain, and China on the pretense of (曾以召开 *ceng yi zhao kai*) imprisoning and having an international military tribunal for the five big Japanese bacteriological weapons war criminals. I assume our Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already received this information, so it should immediately publish the complete document on the front page of every Chinese newspaper (全文在全国各报首页发表 *quan wen zai quan guo ge bao shou ye fa biao*).

Under Vice Foreign Minister Li Kenong's name, immediately write a response, representing the PRC Central Government's complete agreement with the suggestion provided by the government of the Soviet Union. Recall that according to the April 3, 1946 resolution of the Far Eastern Committee, the International Military Tribunal for the Far East should have aimed not just to jail but prosecute the five big Japanese bacteriological weapons war criminals; it must be recommended in future meetings of the International Military Tribunal that China will be represented only by the Central People's Government of the PRC Central Government. Absolutely no Jiang Jieshi representation will be tolerated, as he and his counterrevolutionary group (反动集团 *fan dong ji tuan*) have already lost their rights.

At the same time, in [Li Kenong's] response letter, you should praise the Khabarovsk Military Court from December 25th to 30th, 1949 for presenting such credible and just achievements in the trial of Japanese BW criminals, and reveal the anger present in the Chinese people who personally suffered (亲受 *qin shou*) from the bacteriological weapons of the fascist enemy. This will increase appreciation for our Soviet friends. Conversely, the letter should warn the world countries' governments which have the heart to protect and revive (存心扶植 *cun xin fu zhi*) Japanese imperialism in preparations for a new World War. They should be warned that only unjust governments will refuse the righteous call of the Soviet Union and continue to protect the number-one guilty poison perpetrator of massacring humanity, the head of the war criminals, Japanese Emperor Hirohito (罪大恶极毒杀人类的头等战犯日本天皇裕仁 *zui da e ji du sha ren lei de tou deng zhan fan Riben tian huang Yuren*).

After the strategy of this first draft response letter is complete, immediately show it to the Center [*zhongyang*, e.g., the Central Committee]. At the same time, you should send copies of those letters to British and American governments, and those nations on the Far Eastern Committee. In order to cooperate with the Soviet letter and the Chinese answer, Xinhua should publish an editorial.⁴⁰

Zhou's statement is remarkable for many reasons, but perhaps most interesting is his explicit aim to "reveal the anger present in the Chinese people who personally suffered from the bacteriological weapons of the fascist enemy" as a means of "increase[ing] appreciation for our Soviet friends." Nowhere in the documents is it stated more nakedly than at this moment: the CCP was using anti-Japanese sentiment to drive the Chinese people into the arms of the Soviet Union.

Mao's comments on this matter are unknown; certainly nothing has appeared in the known archives or his published manuscripts. However, the terseness of the above memo, and the directive to have it passed through the Mao's hands shows that the issue was regarded as important and worthy of being reviewed closely and controlled. The document likewise makes evident the specific desire of the CCP leadership to utilize the trial to stimulate anti-Japanese feeling in hopes of convincing the Chinese people of the benefits of Soviet friendship.⁴¹ The Soviet note of February 5 was serving its purpose.⁴²

⁴⁰ "Guanyu taolun ZhongSu tiaoyue he xieding deng qingkuang gei Mao Zedong de dianbao" [Telegraph to Mao Zedong Regarding the Situation of the Negotiation and Signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty], February 9 and 14, 1950, *Liu Shaoqi Wengao*, 487. See also "'Sulian zhengfu zhi wo zhengfu zhaohui; guanyu she guoji tebie junshi fating shenxun Riben xijun zhanfan,'" [Soviet government delivers a note to our government with a proposal to set up an international court to try all classes of Japanese bacteriological weapons criminals] *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], February 5, 1950, 1.

⁴¹ It also shows Zhou's specific willingness to stimulate popular anti-Japanese nationalism in the interests of promoting new China's most significant bilateral alliance. By 1954, as China embarked on a "people's diplomacy" offensive toward Japan, Zhou would downplay the significance of Japanese war crimes. See Adam Cathcart and Patricia Nash, "War Criminals and the Road to Sino-Japanese Normalization: Zhou Enlai and the Shenyang Trials, 1954-1956," forthcoming in *Twentieth-Century China* (April 2009); see also Parks Coble, "China's 'New Remembering' of the War of Resistance, 1937-1945," *China Quarterly*, no. 410 (2007): 394-412.

⁴² It also appears likely that the negotiations for how to handle the war crimes issue were done in Beijing with Liu Shaoqi as the point person. It appears likely that this was done so as to facilitate rapid activation of Xinhua, which was not a part of Mao's delegation, and to get the most rapid publicity for various directives from Moscow. Because "anti-Japanese propaganda" is a frequent accusation thrown at the CCP, it may be useful to divine which members of the CCP hierarchy were pushing for public attention to the BW issue. Understanding this would give readers a more nuanced and variegated look at how the less-than-monolithic CCP approaches the issue of anti-Japanese nationalism more generally.

Now that direction had been given from the highest levels and the Khabarovsk verdict seen as more than a simple top-down propaganda campaign, the ministries became more active. The Ministry of Health was an active participant and the prime mover for the internal discussions in China, but the MFA, once it understood the ability they had to move international dialogue during the negotiations, took the impetus in the person of Vice-Foreign Minister Zhang Hanfu, an experienced cadre who made his imprint on events. The main center of research regarding prior Japanese BW crimes in China (and later the front lines in the preventative health campaigns of 1952-1953) was the *Weishengbu*, or Ministry of Health. Press commentaries stimulated further actions within the government, and an “urgent” meeting was called as a result. In this meeting, several ministries would be represented, including Health, Public Security, Political Affairs (*zhengzhibu*), as well as news cadres from the Propaganda Ministry. Clearly the problem was one for which many departments of the Central Government required mobilization and activation.⁴³ Direction from Moscow had led to a more comprehensive discussion of the problem, and at a rapid pace. Mao and Zhou in Moscow could be assured that the administration they had left behind was functioning smoothly in their absence, while Moscow itself could . In agreeing to meet with Foreign Ministry colleagues, the Ministry of Health officials stated that purpose of their meeting was to “discuss questions concerning the bacteriological warfare atrocities incurred in the past” (过去所举行的细菌战争问题 *guo qu sui ju xing de xi jun zhan zheng wen ti*.)” Zhang Hanfu requested that three of his MFA comrades attend: Yang Gang 杨岗, Qiao Guanhua 乔冠华 and Wen Jianfeng 温剑风.⁴⁴ The topic of the meeting encompassed discussion of the Japanese atrocities, but also raised several implications for the future handling of BW issues.⁴⁵ The meeting concluded with a resolution to continue study of the impact of Japanese BW research in China, and a determined declaration to inform the people of the Japanese crimes.⁴⁶

The Department of Health was vigorously involved in the case and occasionally their documents flash with anger. One typical statement emerged:

⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Wei taolun souji Ri xijun zhanfan” [Regarding Debate about the Collection of Japanese BW Crimes], MFA Archive, 105-00076-02, 21.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Health, “Zhongyang weishengbu gei waijiaobu de xin” [Note to Foreign Ministry], Feb. 1950, MFA Archive, 105-00076-02, 9.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ For first-hand account of the meeting, see Wen Jianfeng, “Canjia zhongyang weishengbu zhaokai guanyu Riben zhanfan xijun zhanzheng zuotanhui de baogao” [Report on Participating Discussions at Meeting Convened by Central Ministry of Health Regarding Japanese Biological Weapons War Crimes], February 9, 1950, MFA Archives, 105-00076-02, 15. A few excerpts from the meeting proceedings were published the next day by Xinhua. See “Rimo qisanyaodui xijun zhanfan de zuixing ziliao” [Evidence Materials of Unit 731 Bacteriological Weapons Atrocities], February 1, 1950, MFA Archives, 105-00076-03, 60-62.

“Don’t be the slaves of the war criminals!” the documents admonished. The Health Department also sought to mobilize and unify all science workers “to unit to protect the Soviet suggestion of organizing a special military tribunal.” Liu Shaoqi went so far as to send reports on these activities to Zhou and Mao in Moscow in 1950 for comment.⁴⁷ The February 9 meeting in Beijing appears pivotal for many reasons. First, decisions had to be made quickly, and the pending pact in Moscow lent some urgency to events. The Beijing meeting presaged very intensive steps to data collection on BW issues, but, more importantly, it placed the investigations in the context of the developing Sino-Soviet relationship—squaring off against the Jiang regime and the United States. The report by one of the meeting’s 40 participants gives more detail on how Health Minister Li Dequan 李德全 sharpened attacks on the former Nanjing government. Her statement faulted the Guomindang government for its silence and ineffectiveness in dealing with the effects of Japanese BW in China, reasons which somewhat less congruously caused Li Dequan to proclaimed her support for Soviet demands that Hirohito and other Japanese participants in the BW program be indicted and handed over to the proper (most likely Soviet) authorities. While focusing on the evils of Japan’s BW program and taking a few swipes at Jiang Jieshi, the final report really announces solidarity with the Soviet Union.⁴⁸

The February 9th meeting spurred mass meetings across China to focus on the BW-Japan issue, supporting the Soviet suggestion and by extension the Soviet Union.⁴⁹ And, in the days surrounding the Ministry of Health meeting, the BW issue achieved considerable prominence in the Chinese news media. On February 11, the *Renmin Ribao* published a number of articles centering upon the existence of Japanese BW crimes in China.⁵⁰ On February 12, the newspaper accelerated the theme, publishing another exposé on Japanese bacteriological warfare research in Manchuria. This last article was emphasized by a front page cartoon about

⁴⁷ “Guanyu taolun ZhongSu tiaoyue he xieding deng qingkuang gei Mao Zedong de dianbao” [Telegraph to Mao Zedong Regarding the Situation of the Negotiation and Signing of the Sino-Soviet Treaty], February 9 and 14, 1950, *Liu Shaoqi Wengao*, 487. See also “Guanyu zhengban Riben xijun zhanfan wenti zuotanhui jilu” [Discussion Notes on the Problem of Prosecuting Japanese BW War Criminals], MFA Archives, 105-00092-01, February 9, 1950.

⁴⁸ Wen Jianfeng, “Canjia zhongyang weishengbu zhaokai guanyu Riben zhanfan xijun zhanzheng zuotanhui de baogao” [Report on Participating Discussions at Meeting Convened by Central Ministry of Health Regarding Japanese Biological Weapons War Crimes], February 9, 1950, MFA Archive Doc. # 105-00076-02, 15.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ “Xijunxuejia Chen Wengui zhengX; Rikou cengzai Changde san shuyijun; Tujing chanmiqu shi dujun manyan” [Expert Chemist Gives Verdict: Organization of Japanese Devils in Changde (Hunan) Spread Pestilence with the Goal of Spreading Germs into Agricultural Areas], “Weishengbu yaojizhuanjia zuotan” [Ministry of Health Invites Experts to Give a Talk Verifying the Occurrence of Biological Warfare Acts in China], *Renmin Ribao*, February 11, 1950.

Japanese BW crimes in southern China entitled “Protecting from Disease, Destroying the Rat.”⁵¹ The cartoon showed a gauntly sick man prostrate in a hospital bed, representing “Zhejiang’s Wenzhou and Guangdong’s Liaohan and other areas after contracting mice plague.” Their sickness has not been solved, making the cartoon a problematic representation of a weak China. However, two men in white masks of indeterminate nationality (either Chinese or Russians) shoo away the dirty mice and one immense rat from their sick patient. This fanged rat, clad in Japanese clogs and Pu Yi-style spectacles, carries two bloody test tubes, his immense hairy tail unhooking from the patient’s bed. If the two doctors are mysterious in origin, cartoonist Hua Junwu leaves no doubt about the leading rat, labeling it as “Japanese Emperor Hirohito and other BW criminals.” Only the wide reach of Chinese patriots and Soviet modernity could scare away the Japanese disease and bring balance to Chinese cities stunted by plague.

Such images also justified the importation of Soviet doctors into Chinese cities. The main accompanying story in the *Renmin Ribao* on February 12 was entitled “Records of Investigation of Bacteriological Weapons Factory Left by the Japanese Devils in Pingfan; Survey by Officials Zhong Lun and Gui Lian.” Photo captions of Pingfan were juxtaposed with the triumphs of “August 15th” noting in the caption that “At the time of Japanese capitulation, the Japanese dual-use airplane bombed their own bacteriological weapons factory....This is further evidence to show that Soviets were correct in their prosecution of crimes around Harbin.” Noting that June 1946 had witnessed much death from rat-borne diseases in the area around Pingfan, the CCP pictured a dead body in a casket, mirroring almost precisely the layout of a famous picture of the Soviet-slain GMD engineer, Zhang Xinfu, in 1946.⁵² Simply, the source of China’s rat problem could be traced to Tokyo and the imperial throne via Harbin.

When Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai finally signed the alliance in Moscow on February 14, 1950, the *People’s Daily* published the alliance and related agreements immediately and in full and trumpeted the benefits of defense against Japan. The text of the alliance deterred “the revival of Japanese imperialism and the resumption of aggression on the part of Japan or any other state” that may collaborate with Japan.⁵³ The treaty’s call for defense against Japan vindicated

⁵¹ The cartoon was buttressed by adjacent articles by the Northeast Health Department (Dongbei Weishengbu) on prevention efforts and another on plague problems in the area of Pingfan which had served as Unit 731’s base of operation.

⁵² See *China Weekly Review*, March 2, 1946; Susanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) 212-215; Jiang Pei, “Yijiusiliu nian chun fan su yundong shuping” in *Zhonghua minguo shi xinlun: zhengzhi, zhongwai guanxi, renwu juan* [Critique of the Spring 1946 Anti-Soviet Movement] in [New Theory of the History of the Republic of China: Politics, Foreign Relations, Personal] (Beijing: Xinzhi Sanlian shudian, 2003).

⁵³ *Renmin Ribao*, February 15, 1950.

popular opinion dissatisfied with the American occupation policies and skeptical of Soviet intentions.

On this triumphant day, the Khabarovsk trials returned to the *Renmin Ribao* and their discussion of Japanese human experiments. Grisly imagery accompanied an article entitled "We Were Used as Experiments for Cold-Weather Wounds."⁵⁴ As the Soviet model pointed the way toward a future society based on communism, China was being encouraged to look back to the past, gathering evidence of Japanese crimes. The Sino-Soviet Alliance, it was implied, would prevent further recurrence of such gruesome atrocities, yet it also gave the appearance that the very power which enabled China's opening path to modernity was unable to steer the country clear of wounds inflicted by Japan. The Alliance's emphasis on defense versus countries allied with Japan was noticed in the West, but the bacteriological weapons allegation gained little purchase.

In the aftermath of the signing of the Sino-Soviet alliance, BW rhetoric on the mainland would not slacken. Public meetings would be held of workers and women, and a traveling exhibition of BW evidence would tour the country. In the Northeast, debates would continue through 1951 about the meaning of the "factories of death," with the commemorators of BW crimes winning a battle and keeping the site intact.

Mobilizing Against BW after the Sino-Soviet Alliance

WITH the signing of the Sino-Soviet pact, the Soviet Union eased off for several months from its urging of China to expose Japanese atrocities. However, the machinery of Chinese government had been primed to investigate and publicize, and as the government began to grow in confidence, these activities expanded rapidly. The Khabarovsk trials had stimulated a nationwide discourse on bacteriological weapons in China, and now, not only were local governments encouraged to collect as much evidence as possible of Japanese atrocities, the Central Ministry of Health actively took the propaganda campaign on the road, publicizing Japan's crimes in hopes of stimulating more reports from local governments.

In the period just prior to and after the signing of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, the Temple of Heaven in the city of Beijing was the site of two large public meetings about Japanese BW atrocities. As a suspected site of Japanese BW use, the location in southern Beijing was key to simultaneously establishing the veracity of Japanese BW crimes and asserting a firm resolve not to see such crimes repeated. The drive for public hygiene in the crowded city also played a role in the meetings which were organized and recorded by the local arm of the Ministry of Health. On January 14, 1950, a group of workers which included many female comrades gathered in the district for the meeting about Japanese BW

⁵⁴ *Renmin Ribao*, February 15, 1950.

where they were asked to describe the crimes.⁵⁵ The evidence collected at the local level was fed to the Central Ministry of Health which synthesized the allegations and passed them on to the Foreign Ministry for use in international propaganda. These Beijing allegations were sufficiently important to be placed first on the agenda for the Ministry of Health's February 9 meeting.⁵⁶ At the Foreign Ministry meeting of the same day, the results of the Temple of Heaven meetings are cited as incontrovertible evidence of Japan's production of BW.⁵⁷ The second meeting at the Temple of Heaven district, on February 16, 1950, reinforced similar themes while celebrating the Soviet role in preventing a recurrence of virulent Japanese militarism.⁵⁸

The unity of domestic mobilization and education with international imperatives was made even clearer by a working group of the State Council. In their summary of the Khabarovsk trials, the State Council emphasized how the proceedings had "verified Japanese Emperor Hirohito's leadership in the former ruling clique's many years of secret preparations for bacteriological warfare." In a slight twist on previous discussions, the State Council described the Japanese as "completely and brutally in violation of the laws and conventions of war, especially in relation to the June 17, 1925, Geneva treaty prohibiting use of bacteriological weapons." After advocating Hirohito's prosecution and setting the international context, the State Council document summarizes the actions taken within the PRC Central Government in response to the Soviet note of February 1. The State Council document sought to synthesize the results from two important meetings – those of February 9 at the Ministry of Health and on March 3, at the Foreign Ministry – in order to "reach conclusions on the means of handling a few matters":

1. Using the [February 9th] forum's name, send out a telegram supporting the Soviet suggestion to have a trial for Japanese Emperor Hirohito and other guilty criminals. This will simultaneously require heightened vigilance of the Chinese people and the people of the whole world against the murderous

⁵⁵ "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], March 7, 1950, MFA Document #105-00092-06, 8-9..

⁵⁶ Ministry of Health to Foreign Ministry, "Souji Riben xijun zhanfan zuixing zhengju jingguo" [Collection of Evidence and Experience of Japanese Biological Weapons Criminal Activity] no date, MFA #105-00076-02, 14.

⁵⁷ "Guanyu zhengban Riben xijun zhanfan wenti zuotanhui jilu" [Discussion Notes on the Problem of Prosecuting Japanese BW War Criminals], MFA Archives, 105-00092-01, February 9, 1950, MFA # 105-00092-01, 13.

⁵⁸ Beijingshi xuanchuanbu [Beijing City Propaganda Bureau], "Ganbu xuexi ZhongSu youhao xin tiaoyue de wenti he yixie sixiang qingkuang" [The Question of Cadre Studying the New Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty, and a Few Ideological Factors], March 30, 1950, Beijing Municipal Archives, 1/12/55.

bacteriological weapons. (This telegraph [can be] drafted by the Central Ministry of Health.)

2. Combine [international] with domestic aspects to investigate the atrocities of the Japanese bacteriological war crimes in China. This work can be done by related Ministries that will aid the Ministry of Health in the collection of materials. Past Ministry of Health collections of [BW] materials have already scored great achievements; seen as propaganda materials, they have already had ample use. Other offices can yet be engaged in helping from all sides. With regard to the courts, their most important mission is to, from the standpoint of laws, conduct research synthesizing the collected materials, producing analysis of that most powerful evidence.

3. As to international propaganda work, this ought to be the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry.

The State Council's prescription for further work in propaganda indicates great awareness in the top echelons of the CCP toward the international implications of bringing forward atrocities of Japanese war criminals. In its concluding "summary of experience," the State Council laid out a self-criticism. Several aspects are worthy of comment, but the most fascinating aspect of what follows is the idea of *Soviet-inspired Chinese consciousness* of Japanese war crimes.

(3) Summary of Experience:

1. In the process of handling this task, we felt that our past attitudes toward the enemy conspiracies had been too common, that our knowledge of [these conspiracies] was still insufficient, that through our brother country of the Soviet Union taking the lead in advancing the problem of the bacteriological crimes, [we could realize] that in fact the Japanese had inflicted powerful injuries upon our people. Now as a result of capable investigation we know how the Japanese in Beijing, Suzhou, Zhenjiang, Datong and all other places cultivated the most powerfully virulent poisons. This will cause us to heighten our spirit of vigilance against the invisible enemies [看不见的敌人 *kanbujian de diren*].

2. We should again augment international propaganda work. For instance, this case [of BW crimes] has connections of considerable importance. Right now American imperialism is reviving Japan, and if we have a plan, we can expose to the Japanese people the despicable conduct of the blindly-worshipped imperial system, using [this propaganda] to raise the

consciousness of the Japanese people. We must seize this time to expose the conspiracies of the Japanese invaders.⁵⁹

In the aftermath of these public meetings, on March 7, the Beijing Temple of Heaven Epidemic Prevention Department had a meeting with nearly twenty people, most of whom were leaders among the city's laborers. They reviewed in detail the BW activities of the Japanese in the city of Beijing. Although the document in the Foreign Ministry Archive does not indicate how this news was to be spread, it follows that factories would be the next step in the propagandization process.⁶⁰

A March 1950 exhibition would bring further information to the masses about BW crimes. One document from the MFA Archives summarizing and criticizing this exhibition is particularly revealing. The authors criticized the exhibition as lacking in documentary richness, as "unsystematic and somewhat messy" indicating that the CCP's vaunted propaganda apparatus was not necessarily always effective in pressing the case for Japanese BW crimes. The criticism also showed, more importantly, the half-developed state of China's evidentiary case against Japan's BW crimes: Just as the nation was being pieced together, so too were the outlines of the puzzle of Japanese BW experimentation in Pingfan and elsewhere becoming clearer. In the evaluation of the exhibition, the Personnel Office administrator was troubled by the discourse on a scientific level. "The explanations of the spread and harm of plague and the infectivity of the various bacteria," he argued, "were inadequate," and "the statistics too few." The lack of statistics and scientific jargon likely resulted from the lack of technical training among the propagandists. However, it is just as likely that a populace largely removed from scientific terminology of the educated elite would have had a difficult time digesting such an exhibit when many schools were just reopening after years of dislocation and warfare. Finally, the critiques of the exhibit reinforce its political intent, as the purpose of the exhibit was less to demand actual justice from Japan than it was to point out how the Soviet Union disciplined those BW criminals in its custody, particularly when contrasted with Ishii Shiro and those scientists "set free by American imperialism." Yet, if the exhibition served its purpose of allowing the Chinese people to "experience Japanese bacteria war criminals' slaughter in person," it would indeed stimulate "greater hatred towards war criminals." With a few minor adjustments,

⁵⁹ Guowuyuan de Gongshang Maoyi Xiaozu [Small Industry and Trade Organizations of State Council] to Foreign Ministry, "Zongjie Riben xijunzhan zuian chuli jingguo" [Conclusions on Responsibility and Solutions for Japanese Biological War Crimes Incidents], February 9, 1950, MFA # 105-00076-02, 16-19.

⁶⁰ The Beijing Municipal Archives contains several useful files on such hygiene mobilization in 1952. See Patricia Nash, "Plague and Propaganda," 107. .

administrators noted, the exhibition could be expanded to cities across China.⁶¹ In April 1950, the exhibition moved to Hunan, where it met with more criticism from provincial party bureaucracies on similar grounds. The MFA fielded the complaints and the exhibition continued on its swing through the south.⁶²

As the exhibition was stimulating public consciousness of Japan's crimes, internal debates continued over the best means of handling an ongoing commemoration of, and research about, the crimes of Unit 731. The major players here were the Northeast Industry Committee and the Northeast Ministry of Health. In discussions, officials from the latter organization showed their sincere interest in preventing future outbreaks of plague and other diseases hatched from Ishii's test tubes. However, the imperatives of industrialization in the Northeast came to a fascinating point of conflict with the process of popular memory. In spring 1950, the Harbin Health Department received from the Asian division of the MFA relaying a debate that had been ongoing within the Northeast People's Government. The debate centered around the future of the Unit 731 facilities at Pingfan, outside of Harbin. Officials responsible for industrialization had been pressing for renovation of the area to serve production goals, against the ardent opposition of the Harbin (and Northeast People's Government) Health Department. Finally the MFA intervened to assert that the area should be "preserved as evidence of the BW atrocities of the Japanese devils" (保留日寇细菌战罪证 *bao liu Rikou xi jun zhan zui zheng*).⁶³

On August 8, as China began to mobilize for the Korean War, a national exhibition occurred in Beijing on the anti-BW theme. Mei Ru'ao, who had represented China at the Tokyo Trials and remained a prominent "third party" voice, sent a note to the Foreign Ministry about the exhibition. As one of the most foremost men of the Republican period to be involved in the justice of Japanese war criminals, the benefits accorded to the CCP by involving Mei in the anti-BW campaign were obvious, both internationally and domestically. On the international level, Mei represented the PRC's claim to the legitimacy of the Tokyo Trials, an ongoing goal of Zhou Enlai's. Domestically, Mei was precisely the type of cultivated "middle force" of intellectual that the Party was wooing with anti-Japanese nationalism in the transitional year after taking power. Mei, perhaps trying to curry political favor with the new administration, noted his

⁶¹ Personnel Office to Foreign Ministry "Wobu cangan 'Ribei xijun zhanfan zuixing zhengju zhanlanhui' de jidian yijian" [A Few Opinions after Our Ministry Attended the 'Evidence of Japanese Biological War Crimes Testimonial Exhibition'], March 5, 1950, MFA Archives, 105-00076-02, 51.

⁶² "Lun Ribei sanbu xijun cailiao" [Critique of Materials Regarding Japan's Spreading of Bacteria], April 8, 1950, MFA Document # 105-00076-02, 50.

⁶³ Xu Shangqun, "Dui Haerbin Pingfanqu shifo baoliu yuanyang de yijian" [Views regarding whether or not to preserve the Pingfan area of Harbin as before / MFA Asian Division to Harbin Weishengbu] MFA Archives, 105-00076-02, 84-85. See also MFA Archives, 105-00107-01.

pleasure with the anti-BW exhibition. From the standpoint of international law, however, Mei suggested cryptically that the exhibition would not cause a diplomatic incident or “international entanglement”.⁶⁴

Mei’s mention of possible international repercussions of the exhibition was likely not incidental. In a note to Zhou Enlai, Zhang Hanfu, and Vice Foreign Minister Li, Health Minister Li Dequan clearly stated that “pieces of evidence from the exhibition can be of use in the meeting on foreign affairs policy.” The close attention and “prudence [慎重]” that Li recommended was accepted immediately by the MFA bureaucracy. Accordingly, Vice Foreign Minister Wang adds that the Asian Affairs (Pacific Department) office would send a person to participate in the meeting/exhibition, agreeing with Li’s comment that the exhibition’s concern with foreign policy (that is to say, foreign propaganda) merited MFA input.⁶⁵ Individuals thereafter contributed articles relaying their first-hand accounts of Unit 731 atrocities, and the Ministry of Health was extremely active in soliciting these pieces. More than simply putting these ideas into print, the Ministry of Health reached ever-wider audiences in the spring of 1950 by organizing community meetings to discuss the meaning of the BW atrocities, the need to prevent future outbreaks, and the promotion of patriotic education.

Conclusion

It now appears clear that the extensive mobilization the PRC government organized around the Khabarovsk Trials in 1949 and early 1950 was a foremost a propaganda device intended to support the Sino-Soviet alliance. However, mass rhetoric about Japanese BW crimes, and the concurrent desire to investigate and prevent further outbreaks, expanded incredibly rapidly in the two months after the trials. Judging from Zhou Enlai’s rather unguarded statement about stimulating anger at Japan as a means of helping Chinese feel closer to the Soviet Union, it seems obvious that the CCP also realized that mass mobilization campaign about past Japanese atrocities could also help to solidify public support for the new regime, not just the Sino-Soviet alliance. Thus, while the Khabarovsk trials and subsequent Soviet actions in February 1950 were not carried out with Chinese input, they nevertheless stimulated public attention to, and vigorous internal debate about, the threat of Japanese bacteriological weapons. For the public, the news from Khabarovsk and the Soviet pledge thereafter to try Hirohito in an international court were a means through which Chinese patriotism could be

⁶⁴ Mei Ru’ao to Wang Bingnan, “Guanyu quanguo weisheng zhanlanhui ‘Xijun zhanfan’” [Regarding National Sanitation Exhibit ‘Biological War Criminals’] August 8, 1950, MFA Archive, 105-00076-02, 52.

⁶⁵ Li Dequan to Zhou Enlai, Li Kenong, and Zhang Hanfu, “Guanyu Riben xijunzhan zhengju zhanlan” [Regarding Exhibition of Japanese Biological War Crimes Evidence], MFA Archive, 105-00076-02, 53.

linked to an ally whose past actions had not always been helpful to China. Perhaps more importantly from the point of view of an analysis of the masses, the stimulation of anti-Japanese consciousness by the Soviets coincided with the advent of the 1950s and was entwined rapidly thereafter with the emerging PRC national identity and peculiar nationalism. For local agencies of the Chinese government, the Soviet actions brought new momentum to health campaigns which sought to gather all available data about Japanese BW crimes on the mainland. And it appears clear that China's public and bureaucratic discourse on BW was thriving more than two years prior to Zhou Enlai's spring 1952 BW allegations against the United States, adding a new layer of context to this significant Cold War episode. Further historical investigation is needed, however, to understand how China's apprehensions toward Japan were marshaled by the CCP and the Soviet Union in the period from 1950-1952, and what role memories of Ishii Shiro's BW atrocities played in the mobilization. Local debates around the meaning of the "factories of death" near Harbin, and the use of various sites in Manchuria for war crimes education of both Chinese and foreign audiences in the 1950s, require additional work if the politics of memory surrounding Unit 731's war crimes are to be more fully understood. Finally, because China's thriving contemporary discourse on Japanese war criminals – particularly BW atrocities – continues to vex and challenge scholarly observers, these questions require addressing with some urgency. Even in the absence today of the Soviet Union, the historical force of the Khabarovsk Trials remains potent indeed. Understanding how those trials influenced anti-Japanese and anti-BW discourses in the early years of PRC, it is hoped, will stimulate further questions regarding the impact of the Cold War on the Chinese Communist Party's complex interpretation of the past.

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