

Germ warfare exposed

Justice, compensation for victims top woman's agenda

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Wang Xuan had never talked with Japanese about World War II even though she lived in Japan for years. Anything she heard about the war she heard from her father.

But her silence was broken since a twist of fate in August 1995.

She happened to read a story in Japan Times about a symposium held on Harbin in Northeast China's Heilongjiang Province concerning the germ attack on her hometown, Yiwu of Zhejiang Province, by Japanese troops during World War II.

She was surprised to learn that three fellow-villagers who were victims of the attack were filing a suit with Japanese court, demanding compensation for their wartime sufferings.

Wang, then 43, had planned to pursue further studies in the United States after completing her master's degree in English education at Tsukuba University.

But she changed her mind when two months later she met two Japanese — Masataka Mori from a Japanese citizens group, and Eisuke Matsui, a professor at Gifu University of Japan. Both had travelled to China to investigate the facts surrounding Japanese germ warfare.

"At the railway station, when I saw them walking towards me, suddenly I realized why I came to Japan and what I was going to do," Wang recalled.

For the first time, she talked openly and freely with Japanese about Japan's wartime atrocities in China.

She volunteered to join the investigation group, formed



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Unite as one: Survivors and family members of victims of the Japanese germ warfare of the 1940s gather to fight for their rights.

sion accompanying the nightmare memories will not heal in the victims' hearts," she explained.

In the early 1980s the Japanese Government admitted the existence of Unit 731, but not its germ warfare, which was banned by the 1925 Geneva Convention. Many Japanese still don't know what Unit 731 did in China in the early 1940s.

In spite of strong evidence, the Japanese continue to deny or trivialize this part of their wartime record, refusing demands for a clear apology.

The cover-up was assisted by the United States in postwar years.

The Allied Forces granted

in Yiwu in January 1998, which, Wang says, was one of the most significant events for the suit.

"For the first time, we Chinese victims united as one, discussing how to fight for our rights in the suit by ourselves," Wang said.

One month later, the court case started in Tokyo. Representing the 108 Chinese victims and relatives of victims of Japan's germ warfare, Wang took the stand at the court, calling for Japan to squarely face its dark past.

"For us, the germ warfare is not the past, but a reality," her voice echoed through the courtroom as some 100 Japanese and Chinese supporters looked on.

come with a message: we are human beings, like any other people around the world, with dignity and rights... We forgive people, but never forgive crimes and evils..."

To help the West better understand the history, Wang helped overseas Chinese hold a photo exhibition about Japanese germ warfare crimes in several cities in Canada and the United States in the summer of 1998.

In the meantime, she returned to China more frequently, not only preparing for the case, but also calling for more attention from Chinese scholars.

A symposium on Japanese war crimes was held in Beijing

hide under a bureaucratic shroud of secrecy, said Sheldon Harris, professor of history emeritus, California State University. Harris is the author of "Factories of Death."

Whether the act would be passed next year or Chinese victims would win the case still remains a question.

Nine testimonies for the lawsuit have been held in the court. Wang has not seen the light at the end of the tunnel.

"The case might last for another five or 10 years," Wang said. "If one more person in the world knows about the history of Japanese germ warfare we are one more step closer to victory."

She volunteered to join the investigation group, formed mainly by Japanese lawyers and researchers, and to help the Chinese victims with the suit. That decision became a turning point in Wang's life.

Born in Shanghai in 1952, Wang had known as a child the germ warfare attack that had killed eight of her family members in Chongshan Village of Yiwu.

After graduating from Hangzhou University in 1976, Wang began to work as an English teacher in Yiwu Middle School where she worked for eight years. The experience would play a key role in her later career.

When she returned to Yiwu with other Japanese researchers, locals took her as one of their family members telling her everything they knew of the germ warfare attack of 1942.

Most villagers still hold grudges against Japan due to the bitter memory of Japanese wartime atrocities. So Wang was indispensable to both the Chinese and Japanese to help them communicate.

"The investigation is a good dialogue, which might help to shrink the gulf of mistrust and misunderstanding between China and Japan," Wang said.

With the investigation going more and more in-depth, both Wang and Japanese investigators were overwhelmed by the fact that so many people suffered and are still suffering from the germ warfare.

According to their investigation, 1,070 villagers in Yiwu died in the plague in 1942.

"Figures don't tell the whole story," Wang said, though she noted she believes statistics can also be strong evidence.

"All the pain and the depres-

years.

The Allied Forces granted immunity from war crimes prosecution to Japanese doctors in exchange for their data and helped cover up the human experiment, said Watanabe Nobori, a researcher on the notorious Unit 731.

To collect evidence, the investigation group had covered most affected areas in Zhejiang and Hunan provinces. They found the Japanese troops conducted germ experiments and infected people with plague, cholera, anthrax and a dozen other pathogens.

"We're convinced that the area was experimental ground for the Japanese troops because many places were mentioned in the diary of Kumao Imoto, a staff officer of the Japanese troops in China, which was found in the Defence Agency's National Defence College," said Japanese lawyer Keiichiro Ichinose, one of the leaders of the investigation group.

Besides investigating the Chinese victims, Wang herself travelled around Japan to meet former soldiers of Unit 731, collecting valuable information about the Japanese germ warfare.

With two years of preparation, 108 survivors and family members from six areas of China filed a suit in August 1997 with the Tokyo District Court. They demanded that the Japanese Government acknowledge the damage and compensate them with 1.8 billion yen (US\$17.6 million).

Of the 30 war-damage suits filed with the Japanese court, this was the first concerning Japan's use of biological weapons during World War II.

To fully prepare for the court, all of the plaintiffs got together

room as some 100 Japanese and Chinese supporters looked on.

"Even now, examinations of flea and mice in the affected areas show they have antibodies to the plague. That means the disease germs remain in the town and could cause another epidemic," she told the court.

Her forceful words impressed everybody in the court.

"Compensation is not the priority. What we want is the justice," Wang stressed.

"In the following two years, Wang did not confine her fight to the courtroom and strived to win support throughout the world.

She lectured in numerous international symposiums and conferences, disclosing the Japanese germ warfare and calling for more support for the victims.

In December 1996, she attended a memorial conference held by overseas Chinese in Toronto. Her forceful speech invoked a standing ovation: "I've

A symposium on Japanese war crimes was held in Beijing recently. Scholars and victims of Japanese germ warfare attack from all over the country attended the two-day event.

Many of the victims have set up investigation groups to collect evidence of Japanese wartime crimes in Zhejiang, Hunnan and Yunnan provinces.

Wang pointed out at the meeting that many of the victims of Japanese war crimes are elderly and some of them pass away daily.

A legislation act has been proposed by US Senator Diane Feinstein of California, requiring the disclosure of classified records and documents in the possession of the US Government regarding chemical and biological experiments carried out by Japan during World War II.

The act might help bring to light known instances of such violations rather than let them

more step closer to victory."

Germ warfare killed 270,000

An in-depth study by Chinese and Japanese scholars shows that at least 270,000 Chinese soldiers and civilians were slaughtered by Japanese germ warfare troops between 1933 and 1945.

Chinese scholars, including Guo Chengzhou and Liao Yingchang from the Academy of Medical Sciences affiliated with the Chinese People's Liberation Army, put the figure at more than 270,000. But some Japanese experts believe the total is no less than the number of people killed in the Nanjing Massacre, in which at least 300,000 Chinese died.

According to the researchers, Japanese troops who invaded China between 1932 and 1945 set up a germ warfare base in Wuchang County in Northeast China's Heilongjiang Province in 1933 and eventually deployed five "bacteriological experimentation units" with a total of over 20,000 men in the cities of Harbin, Changchun, Beijing, Nanjing and Guangzhou.

Twenty Chinese provinces were attacked by these Japanese units who spread deadly diseases including typhoid, cholera, diarrhea, fever, anthrax, lockjaw and gangrene.

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"All the pain and the depression accompanying the nightmare memories will not heal in the victims' hearts."

WANG XUAN, 47, is leading 108 Chinese survivors of the germ war to file a lawsuit demanding the Japanese Government acknowledge the damage and compensate survivors and families.