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Scholar reveals more on germ war

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SHANGHAI: Japanese military leaders tried to cover up the country's use of biological weapons in China during Japan's aggression in 1930s and 1940s in an attempt to keep Japanese Emperor Hirohito from being held responsible for war crimes, a Japanese scholar said yesterday.

Shoji Kondo, a TV journalist who began to study Japanese germ warfare in 1976, made the remark in Shanghai before he left for Japan this morning to testify in the Tokyo District Court on the alleged link between Japan's use of biological weapons and outbreaks of disease in China.

"Japanese leaders were desperate to cover up their use of germ warfare because they knew such a thing violated international law and that the late Emperor Hirohito would be charged with war crimes," Kondo said.

"It is high time that the Japanese Government and leaders apologize to the Chinese for the atrocities committed by the Japanese Imperial Army in China. It should be done before all the victims and their relatives die," he said.

Kondo said that Japan's military headquarters ordered its units in China to destroy evidence of biological warfare as early as August 9, 1945, when the United States dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki.

After years of research, Kondo found that many documents in Harbin in Northeast China's Heilongjiang Province were destroyed, but that the most important parts survived.

Kondo said Japan's use of biological weapons in China is still obscure partly because the United States made a deal with the Japanese in exchange for secret scientific data.

The identities of unit leaders were kept secret so they could remain at large, and many of them were later given key positions in universities and

pharmaceutical companies, Kondo said.

Kondo will appear at the Tokyo District Court on February 28 for a group of 180 Chinese plaintiffs, who are demanding an apology and compensation for the deaths of their relatives, who they say were the victims of Japanese germ warfare.

The lawsuit, filed in 1997, says that thousands of people, including 2,100 civilians whose personal details have been verified in China, were killed by biological weapons and other acts of brutality carried out by Japan's notorious Unit 731 and Unit 164.

However, an in-depth study by Chinese and Japanese scholars shows that at least 270,000 Chinese soldiers and civilians were killed as a result of Japanese germ warfare between 1933 and 1945.

Twenty provinces were attacked by Japanese units spreading deadly diseases, including typhoid, cholera and **anthrax**. Many details were recorded in the book "Factory of Death" by Sheldon Harris, a renowned US historian and professor.

The court case began in February 1998, and since then 20 hearings have been held.

Wang Xuan, 43, chairwoman of the Chinese plaintiffs' group, said: "No one can deprive the Chinese victims and their relatives of their right to seek justice."

Japan acknowledged several years ago that Unit 731 had existed, but the government refused to admit its atrocities and make apologies to China.

Wang Xuan, Shoji Kondo and four Chinese witnesses will attend the 21th hearing on February 28 in the Tokyo District Court.

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