

Why Is It so Easy for the Chinese to Lie?

Examining the mystery of the keyword “*bihui*”

by
Kitamura Minoru and Lin Siyun

1. Aggressive war was not a crime (Kitamura Minoru)

I have investigated from every direction on how the Nanking War Crimes Tribunal, which was concurrent with the Tokyo Trials, came to be held. When I tried to cite the memoirs of Shi Meiyu (the chief judge of the Tribunal the man who had sentenced to death the Japanese officers who were smeared with the infamy of the supposed “Killing 100 Soldiers by the Sword”), I had to go to the library to do research to substantiate matters as I was somewhat uneasy about the dates on which he wrote things. What I used was *Prelude to Nuremberg*, by the international legal scholar Arie J. Kochavi.

Kochavi was an Israeli, but his book was written in English. No Japanese translation has been done. This may have been because in Japan, the enemies’ viewpoints are taken as authentic, so those favorable toward Japan are usually neglected; but we are awaiting its translation.

One of the entries in the contents is the heading, “Is Aggressive War a Crime?” My original purpose had been to confirm how the Nanking Tribunal had been brought about, but I decided to carefully read Kochavi’s book.

Roosevelt’s maxim

The use of the word “aggressive” in “aggressive war” does not, logically, imply any meaning that “aggression is bad.” Ideas such as “offensive,” “striking first,” or “planning a pre-emptive strike” are more common.

When I would on occasion visit the American Museum of Natural History in New York City, I would see one of the maxims of America’s twenty-sixth president, Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), carved on the wall of the entrance way. It says, “Aggressive fighting for the right is the noblest sport the world affords.” This “aggressive fighting” carried out by the state is synonymous with “aggressive war,” and of course it praises this heroic action. It would, of course, be better to have a term that indicated which side plotted and caused the outbreak of a war. To begin, when Roosevelt’s words were carved on the wall, war was recognized as the final legal step a state could take in international diplomacy; there was no ethical judgment made on whether war in itself was good or bad.

So — why was planning a preemptive strike viewed as the crime of “aggressive war”? I would like to continue, relying on *Prelude to Nuremberg* as I go.

At the height of the Second World War, the World Jewish Congress appealed to American and British officials that “the Nazis are carrying out an extermination of the Jews”; but the officials ignored this with the response that it was “a political problem not directly related to the war. Even if Germany is massacring German Jews, surely that is an internal matter.” It is difficult to substantiate war crimes, so it is possible that the true situation was that they just didn’t want to take the trouble to do so.

A blow glancing off the Nazis

At the same time, occupied countries like Czechoslovakia and Poland were suffering from the merciless German “aggression,” and many, centered on a legal advisor to the Czech government in exile named Bohuslav Ečer, were earnest in documenting its criminality. Seeing that claiming aggressive war was a war crime was not receiving acceptance, Ečer claimed, “Hitler and his cohorts have committed sufficient other crimes [besides waging aggressive war] to warrant the death penalty, and if this opinion can gain acceptance, it will prove profitable in coming up with a way to properly settle all the different examples of the goings-on of the criminal policies of the Axis Powers.” He tenaciously continued, “I am not judging whether aggressive war is or is not a crime; I want to have it decided whether the Second World War itself is a crime or not.”

Arnold McNair, a British scholar of international law, was in a position to guide things at the meeting of the United Nations War Crimes Commission in London in 1943, and after the war was a judge at the International Court of Justice in the Hague. McNair, while recognizing the existence of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, a treaty that renounced war as a means of executing national policies, said, “we cannot consider Germany’s war as a whole, conducted by a general mobilization of the national structure, as a crime.” In other words, he was saying that it was meaningless to judge aggressive war as a crime.

After defeat, however, when the reality of Germany’s concentration camps was brought to light, Germany’s “aggressive war” and their slaughter of the Jews became indivisibly linked, which became a major issue. As a result, in May of 1945, Robert J. Jackson, who’d been appointed as the chief prosecutor for the Allies, became the American representative to the United Nations War Crimes Commission. Jackson charged that Germany’s aggressive war was an *evil* war, saying, “waging an aggressive war is a war crime.” To round up all the Nazis in one basket, he promoted the legal principle that they had been involved in a “conspiracy.” As can be understood from these particulars, the main goal of the United Nations War Crimes Commission from the beginning had been, ultimately, to prosecute the Nazis. Japan is actually scarcely touched on in Kochavi’s book. Given these circumstances, however, with Japan’s surrender, the new platform that “waging an aggressive war is a war crime” was also applied toward Japan, and the holding of a tribunal to judge Japan’s war was included in the Potsdam Declaration. You could say that Japan was struck by a blow glancing off of Nazi Germany.

To repeat: “aggressive war” is nothing more than the objective meaning of “a war where a preemptive strike was planned” that is recognized under international law as the final measure of diplomacy when a settlement cannot be reached. It was under these conditions that the First Sino–Japanese War and the Russo–Japanese War took place, and it was the exact same framework under which the Second Sino–Japanese War was begun. It was *after* the war that it was linked with Nazi Germany and quickly judged to be a “war crime.” But to judge Japan using the same logic used to prosecute the Nazis was really difficult.

Rape of Nanking — the outrage that had to be

There was no systematic genocide perpetrated by the Japanese like the Nazi extermination of the Jews. On the contrary, the establishment of the state of Manchukuo, which had its start in Japan’s “aggressive war,” had the “Concord of Nationalities” (represented by the Manchurians, Han Chinese, Mongolians, Koreans, and Japanese) as its founda-

tional principle. With the American embargo of oil and steel, one can't question that even the Pacific War was one fought in self defense.

For the Allies, to roll up all of Japan's war leaders in one basket for judgment, it was necessary for Japan's war to have been an "evil war," with actions toward the indigenous population one of massacres on a level equal with the Germans', and for the war to have been not only simply an "aggressive war." The thing got used as a reason for that was the chaos during the Japanese army's occupation of Nanking. They were able to judge Japan in a high-handed manner using the "rape of Nanking" as a match for the Nazi holocaust.

If you think of it that way, all the questions melt away.

It's necessary to try to divorce the idea that "aggressive war is evil" from a fixed view that "waging aggressive war is a crime." Following the current historical viewpoint, we'll never be able to see the reality of the Second Sino-Japanese War no matter how long it takes and it will be completely impossible to learn from history.

One person who shares a few of the ideas I have is a Chinese doctor of engineering named Lin Siyun, who has studied the Second Sino-Japanese War. Lin and I both assert that, "aggression in China was not one-sided on the part of the Japanese. The Chinese also wanted a war and acted proactively to get it. The war was therefore a struggle between mutual rivals." We collaborated in the production of the book *The Reluctant Combatant: Japan and the Second Sino-Japanese War* (online at http://www.sdh-fact.com/CL02_1/78_S4.pdf; *Nitchû Sensô: Sensô o nozonda Chûgoku, sensô o nozomanakatta Nihon*), published by PHP Press. I have basically organized the entirety of our exchange of opinions to this point and have shared the writing of it. I don't expect anything but readers' criticism for the execution of this work, but I felt as though my eyes were opened when I heard the words of Mr. Lin, who deciphers things using an understanding of the peculiar Chinese mindset in descriptions of Chinese history that is *bihui*. The following is from when I spoke with Mr. Lin about the true image of the Second Sino-Japanese War including that point.

2. What is this "*bihui*" that lies hidden in the Chinese historical viewpoint? (Kitamura Minoru and Lin Siyun)

Kitamura

Mr. Lin, you studied polymers at Nanking University, if I'm not mistaken. How did you develop an interest in history, and in particular the history of the Second Sino-Japanese war?

Lin

Originally I was interested in history and the social sciences, but due to complicated situations in China, the social sciences aren't particularly popular there at the present. There were all sorts of restrictions, so when I was in college I thought it would be better to study the sciences.

Kitamura

If you were doing history, you'd end up running up against the viewpoint of the Communist Party, eh? You couldn't really fully develop your own personal theories.

Lin

Since I came to Japan, I've come to realize that the take on history is totally different than that which I learned in China. Since then, I've started thinking about the Second Sino-Japanese war. In particular, there was a documentary broadcast on NHK in August of 2000 called "Special Broadcast: The Second Sino-Japanese War." They suggested that the responsibility for the expansion of the war was on the Japanese militarists, and the Chinese were just sitting there when they were set upon. From a Chinese viewpoint you couldn't say there wasn't a haughty attitude in seeing at Japanese saying sincerely that the responsibility for the war was on Japan. It's just not true that if the Japanese wanted to expand the war, they could just expand it, or if they wanted to end the war, they could just have ended it. In China, too, the desire for war against Japan had greatly grown, and I think it would have ended up in a full-scale war even if Japan hadn't wanted to fight. I think it was the same as with France in Vietnam. We aren't really clearly seeing the situation at that time if we ignore the intentions of the Chinese who wanted independence and were willing to fight spontaneously. In fact, the Battle of Shanghai (13 August, 1937), which brought about the full-scale war between China and Japan, was caused by the Chinese.

It was China who desired war

Kitamura

On 14 August, the special landing force of the Japanese navy that was in Shanghai and the Third Fleet's flagship (the *Izumo*), which had been sent there to protect the Japanese residents being evacuated, were bombed by the Chinese air force. All the bombs missed, though, and fell on the Shanghai International Settlement. Because of that, many Chinese — as well as foreigners — perished.

Lin

Yes. (Laughter.)

Kitamura

Afterwards, they made excuses about the bombs going off-target due to a typhoon and so on. Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro's cabinet responded to the attack and said, "punish pernicious China." By that, he meant to chastise the rude ruffian that was China. It may be a bit much to use such words now, but for dropping bombs all of a sudden, to say nothing of dropping them on the Shanghai International Settlement, you *could* say that much. You have to think concretely about what was behind it. At that time, the one being "aggressive" was China, wasn't it?

Lin

After the Manchurian Incident [1931], the residents of Shanghai undertook intense anti-Japanese, patriotic actions that then spread to all the big cities throughout the whole country. Chiang Kai-shek's "Japan-phobia" was attacked; students advocating fighting Japan burst into the central party of the Guomindang, and tried to destroy the offices of the *Central Daily News* [*Zhongyang Ribao*, the Guomindang newspaper] but ran up against the military police. Over thirty students died. At the Marco Polo Bridge Incident

[1937], the armies of both China and Japan were at an explosive state, so the question of who fired first is not really a major one. Of course there is a desire to sidestep the issue, but there would have been nothing odd with *either* side having fired first. It was a fight that started because it *had* to start. There is also a theory — which is also not strange — suggesting that the Communist Party forces began firing with the intentions of starting a war.

Kitamura

Which one was “aggressive” or which one planned a preemptive attack — these are not the problem. Although there is a possibility that the one who planned it was an “aggressor nation”... (Laughs.)

Lin

Originally, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident itself was not a major encounter. The Manchurian Incident, the Shanghai Incident, and the Chengde Incident, all of which took place before, were far more important in terms of being military engagements, but the pacifist faction in China was stronger then, so they didn’t lead to an all-out war. Because the pro-war faction took the leadership, however, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident became the cue for rushing into a full-scale war.

It wasn’t Japan who wanted the war to spread. It was China.

China thought that if even if Japan were to win the war in the affected regions, Japan would be unable to withstand a full-scale war that was backed by the whole country, so China would then win.

The militarists maintained that there was no way they could lose to Japan as China was more powerful in terms of population, land area, and natural resources. What’s more, there was also the expectation that, if the war were to spread, the world’s great powers who were tolerant of Japan’s rule in Manchuria would surely intervene against Japan to remove the threat to their interests in China.

Kitamura

I see.

And if the aggressor was Japan?

Lin

In Chinese textbooks, it says, “Japan waged aggression against China, planning to destroy it,” but that’s not really any different than the reason America started its war against Iraq.

They did it to bring down the anti-Japanese Nationalist government and create a pro-Japanese administration, to remove the threat to Japan on the Chinese mainland. In this, they failed, so they just had to slog on in a war that went on and on. Japan could not have intended to fight such a long war. To say nothing of wanting an all-out war or anything.

Kitamura

To begin with, Chiang Kai-shek entered into a friendly relationship with Nazi Germany in the first half of the 1930s to obtain armaments and renovations to help fight Japan. This is a surprising fact that is little known. The weapons used by the Chinese army

against the Japanese military from Shanghai to Nanking were German-made, the defensive encampments were in the German style, and the ones guiding their tactics were military advisors sent over from Germany. In return for this military assistance, the Germans wanted the tungsten mined in China. Tungsten is a rare metal used in the production of machine tools whose blades don't nick or break and artillery shells. It would be fair to say that this propped up Germany's munitions industry and enabled the expansion of German strength throughout Europe.

Germany desired a certain level of peace between China and Japan, however. They were concerned that, if the war between them grew too fierce, their military preparations toward the Soviet Union would prove inadequate as well. At the time Germany and the Soviet Union were the biggest mutual enemies and Germany hoped Japan would constrain the Soviet Union.

That's why Germany's ambassador to China, Oskar Trautmann, set out to try to bring about peace between China and Japan after the fall of Nanking.

Lin

It was actually the Soviet Union who wanted a war between China and Japan. It was to block Japan's possible actions against *them*.

Too honest to see what's really going on

Kitamura

That's why the Soviet Union, too, entered into a mutual non-aggression pact with China when the Second Sino-Japanese War began, sending military advisors and providing weapons to the Nationalist government. It wasn't that the Soviet Union was hoping for a Chinese victory, however. It was because, originally, China had been acting hostilely toward them over Manchuria. It would have been fine with them if the Japanese army were just pinned down inside China. Interests get extremely complicated in this area.

Lin

Japan also knew somewhat about Germany's military assistance to China.

Kitamura

Japan tried protesting about it once, too. But even after Japan signed the Tripartite Agreement with Germany and Italy, Germany continued assisting the Nationalist government. They did it using the name of a different country. Hitler said, "do everything you can to keep it secret from Japan." On one hand, they showed good will toward Japan, recognizing Manchukuo and sending out military advisors. With Germany's recognition of the Japanese puppet regime of Wang Jingwei in 1941, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government finally broke off relations, bringing to an end their military assistance.

Lin

And on the other hand, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression treaty with each other, so this is all very complicated.

Kitamura

While the Japanese and the Soviet Union were clashing in the Nomonhan Incident in

1939, Hitler and Stalin were joining hands. The cabinet of Prime Minister Hiranuma Kiichirô said, “the state of affairs in Europe is both complicated and mysterious,” and they all resigned en masse. (Laughs.) Japanese were too honest and couldn’t see what was really going on. The only thing I’m going to say is, they were lacking in proactive strategies.

Lin

There were various influences inside China, too. There was the Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek, the army of the Communist Party, regional military parties opposed to Chiang, and there were even forces favorably disposed toward Japan. They were willing to borrow the strength of the Japanese army to exterminate the Nationalist government and to achieve their own personal ends. The Manchurians who established the state of Manchukuo, the autonomous government of Inner Mongolia, and officials of the former Beiyang government (which had been thrown out by the Nationalists), borrowed Japan’s strength and resurrected the Beiyang government. On paper, the army of the Communist Party was incorporated into the army of the Nationalist government — that is, the Nationalist Revolutionary Army — and their names were changed to the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army; but the areas they controlled moved about and they frequently clashed with the Nationalist army and there were repeated disputes.

Pu Yi must have been thrilled

Kitamura

That’s all why it probably would have been better if Japan hadn’t mucked up getting involved and just remained a spectator instead. Originally Japan got a hold of interests inside Manchuria when Japan received them from imperial Russia (which had no other recourse) in lieu of reparations for the Russo–Japanese War. As far as Japanese plans went, that was the worst-case scenario. Because of that, Japan got swallowed up in the disputes over complicated interests inside China. In the Chinese view, their interests that had been made over to imperial Russia as a debt were just subleased for a fixed time. They just became a heavy burden. So, wanting these fixed-term interests to become secure, Japan issued the “Twenty-One Demands” to extend the deadline, angering the Chinese. Before long, the Japanese management of the South Manchurian Railway fell into a situation where they were gradually losing money due to an economic offensive by the Chinese. From early on, the Chinese had been constructing a train line to run side-by-side against the Manchurian Rail. Thus Manchuria had to be made independent of China. The melancholy last Qing emperor of China, who had been forced from Beijing’s Forbidden City in 1912, just happened to live in the concession in Tianjin. He felt bitter toward both the Manchurians and the Nationalist government, so setting him up was beneficial to the interests of both parties. Soldiers of the Nationalist government despoiled the tomb of the Empress Dowager Cixi, and that, too, enraged Pu Yi.

I imagine Pu Yi was thrilled at what the Japanese were offering him, even though at the Tokyo Trials he said he was forced by Japan to become the emperor of Manchukuo.

Lin

The only countries in Asia who didn’t become colonies were China and Japan. They had to beef up their military power so as not to become colonized. Both China and Japan

aimed at being rich countries with strong armies. In Japan, there was Fukuzawa Yukichi's admonition to "leave Asia and enter Europe," and in China there was the "Self-Strengthening Movement." Since both of them meant trying to move forward in becoming a modern state with a modern military, China and Japan were rivals. It was Japan, though, who succeeded in modernizing and militarizing. In the First Sino-Japanese War, the loser, and in fact the only force who did any substantial fighting, was the Beiyang army of Li Hongzhang. The days of the Qing dynasty were numbered. China's mistake was that in "strengthening the army" all they did was import advanced Western weaponry and train the elite officer classes; they didn't give a single thought to the training of the common soldiers.

Kitamura

Japan and China were worthy rivals as they both moved toward modernization in the face of Western pressure. If you think about it from the point of view that they shared a common soil, it's only natural; but there were few in Japan who would say anything like that.

Lin

In China the disparity was severe between the elite and the peasantry and between the cities and the farming communities. This is the same in modern-day China, and it's been the source of many problems as is known even in Japan.

The Second Sino-Japanese War, where fellow modernized states rose up to do battle with one another, should have been a huge war, but the Chinese set-up at that time just wasn't up to it. There is a way of thinking in China where, as a cultural tradition, everyone other than the elites were considered *yúmin* — "ignorant people." Peasants brought together and made into soldiers were basically just "ignorant people." Exactly as the characters in Chinese imply, they were just people — *min* — who were congenitally stupid — *yú* — and it was believed that education was unnecessary for them. They only had to follow the orders of the ruling class of elites who were *born* elite. In *The Analects*, there is a line: "The people may be made to follow a path of action, but they may not be made to understand it." As this shows, it is tradition in China that the "ignorant" have no ability to understand matters, so the wise must rule over them in their ignorance. That's why there was no conception of training the soldiers.

The difference with "rich country, strong army"

Kitamura

All because the peasants were "ignorant people." The dispute between the pacifists and militarists regarding Japan was also a dispute between elites.

Lin

That's right. The peasants lacked the authority and information to debate matters of state. The peasants didn't know why they had to fight Japan, and to begin with, they didn't even know where Japan *was*. In the Japanese army, there were soldiers who even thought they knew which regional military force they were fighting. Honest officers of the Guomindang army said, "the tactical level of Japanese army officers above the middle ranks is one or two steps above ours. The lower-ranked officers are two or three steps

above. When it comes to the common soldiers, we are nowhere near the enemy.”

According to Lin Bao, the division commander of the Communist Party’s Eighth Route Army, the Chinese soldiers received no combat training and had no basic military knowledge and didn’t even know about creeping forward — so they just *stood* there where they were and fired their weapons. When moving forward in a group, they made perfect targets for the enemy. Afterward, Li Zongren, who became vice president of the Republic of China, said there were those who didn’t even duck down or run for cover when Japanese warplanes were dropping bombs — they just stood straight up, looking at the planes, and shouting abuse at them.

They were totally incomparable next to the well trained, to say nothing of properly educated, Japanese soldiers. That was one great difference between the Chinese and Japanese armies.

In Japan, education wasn’t just for the elites. It spread to everyone with no divisions — from average people on down to the peasantry. The intellectual level was universally high. I think that shows the difference between Japan with her “rich country, strong army” motto and China.

Kitamura

China had that sense of pride that it had cultural superiority, so they thought that all they needed to bring in from overseas was weapons and techniques. But it was only the culture of elites.

Pressganging peasants and making them soldiers

Lin

In China, the elites despised physical labor. There is a proverb that says, “The vulgar man exerts his brawn; the noble man exerts his brain.” In addition to soldiery being physical labor, it is also putting one’s life at risk, so none of the elites wanted to become a soldier, which was at the lowest social level. During the time of the Nationalist government, even though a conscription system made its appearance, people in the cities could pay money to avoid military service. As a result, they didn’t have enough soldiers to fight in the Second Sino–Japanese War, so the Nationalist government carried off male peasants of military age and forced them to be soldiers under the “Pressgang Able-Bodied Men” [抓壮丁, *zhuā zhuàngdīng*] system. Soldiers thus forcibly dragged off only naturally seized any available opportunity to run away, so one of the necessary duties of the officers was to prevent soldiers from deserting. If a peasant had any money, however, he, too, could bribe his way out of military service. So if the number of conscripted soldiers was insufficient, they would just pressgang random people they met on the way and drag them off. They treated them horribly — binding them, not giving them sufficient food, etc. — and so many of them tragically died even before reaching the battlefield. This was seen by not just the Chinese, but also Americans, who have left us written accounts.

Kitamura

In the end, the army of Mao Zedong’s Communist Party made friends with the peasantry, but because of that “ignorant people” thing, Chinese peasants were ambivalent about the government; so if it was the Nationalist army, the Communist army, even the Japanese army — as long as they didn’t harm them and left them alone and let them live

in peace — the peasants didn't care who the army belonged to.

Lin

Since there was this disparity in “quality” between the soldiers, Japan was easily able to occupy key Chinese ports and cities. With the exception of Manchuria, Japan was only able to control the cities, like islands on the continent; but they were unable to extend that success into the expansive Chinese rural districts. Next, having occupied a large number of cities became a liability for Japan. The Japanese military invading China numbered as many as a few hundred thousand. The numbers of the residents of the occupied cities, however, was from several million to ten million. There was no way the Japanese army could feed such swelling numbers. Be that as it may, there wasn't enough food in Japan at that time, either, so they couldn't bring any over. The only thing they could do was source the food locally. The Japanese army wanted to try to procure rations peacefully, but anarchy appeared in all the places the Japanese army went with the intent of establishing a pro-Japanese government. At that, they were left with no choice but to take it by force from the countryside. Thereafter, the peasants who had before been neither anti-Japanese or resisted them felt there was no option left for them but to resist the Japanese.

Kitamura

Since the Japanese army provoked a backlash in the peasantry, the Communist Party army ended up getting backing from the peasants as if it were a reunion of long-lost brothers. At the close of the 1920s, Mao Zedong began anti-Guomindang guerilla actions with the peasants, but from the beginning he was not supported by the peasants — so little so, in fact, that he said he felt lonely. Then, before the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Guomindang snatched the peasants away from him for a time. Then the Japanese army came in and, due to the backlash they created, the Communists came back to life. At any number of occasions after the war, Mao said that the Communists were ultimately able to win thanks to the Japanese.

Why do the Chinese lie?

Lin

The Japanese army's forced acquisition of food was called *qiǎng jiāng* — “stolen rations.” When villagers realized that the Japanese were coming, they hid their food and domestic animals and they themselves fled to hide up in the mountains or elsewhere. When the Japanese army found the food and took it all away, leaving nothing, the desperate villagers had no recourse to starving to death but to become thieves and steal food from other villages. Thereupon *those* villagers had to turn to another village to steal food from, creating a vicious cycle. Many villages had bitter experiences such as this. Anti-Japanese grudges spread, and ultimately the number of peasants backing the Communist Party with armed resistance against the Japanese grew. This was the reason for the rapid increase in the strength of the Communist Party.

Kitamura

I hadn't known they confiscated food from the farming villages so they could feed the townsfolk and the result was that the villagers, too, had to scramble for food until I read what you wrote.

Lin

I don't think there were many in the Japanese army who personally killed average Chinese citizens, but they brought chaos to the order in China.

Kitamura

The Chinese had the more skilled strategic planning during the war. They were hand in hand with the Germans and the Soviets, and at the end they made America their ally. In reading the documents of the Defense Ministry, we find that the Japanese actually didn't want to prolong the war, and that they tried any number of times to make peace with the Nationalist government. Chiang Kai-shek, however, weighed it on the balance while watching the Americans' attitudes, so diplomacy made very little progress. Upon making sure that America was a friend, he put an end to negotiations. The foundation of the Chinese way of thinking is resourcefulness and scheming. They know that winning without fighting is the best way.

The Japanese love Sunzi's *Art of War*, and he says, "if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles," so it was assumed from the start that there would be a fight. The Japanese were samurai, so they had to fight.

Japanese also love Confucius' *Analects*, but there's that word you've used: *bihui*. Japanese haven't thought deeply about that in the present day. They really know the Confucian virtues — *ren*, righteousness, etiquette, knowledge, integrity, loyalty, and filial piety — but now I'm grateful that I understand this from your explanation of *bihui* as a virtue in traditional Chinese historical understanding on the same level as those.

Confucianism as a religion rather than a philosophy

Lin

In Japan, *The Analects* are a part of Confucianism — the *philosophy* of Confucius [学, *Jugaku*]. It is taken as a subject of study. For Chinese, however, Confucianism is a religion [儒教, *Rúxié*]. At one point it was censured for being antithetical to Communist Party dogma, but Confucius was culture and he was custom for the Chinese; more than just thinking, he was ingrained in their very souls. In Japan, being honest is the most important thing, but in China honesty is not that important. The most important thing is "face." *Bihui* means hiding and shirking and so on, and what is *proper* is that one must conceal things that are unfavorable to the state or the family even if it means departing from the truth. The reputation of your group can't be dishonored.

Kitamura

It resembles the Japanese word *kihi* [忌避], which means "evasion," but that has a much more positive meaning. In Japan, "honesty" and "face" aren't that antagonistic. In Japan, we believe that if you speak honestly you aren't going to cause damage to your "face."

Lin

For the Chinese, "history" is acceptable even if it isn't an accumulation of facts. On the contrary: things that are inconvenient or disgraceful to the state must in no way be

brought to light. That is a way of thinking to stabilize the state, and to keep peace in society. To do that, actively lying is the proper conduct. It is a big mistake to think that the Chinese exaggerate things and lie unconcernedly just for the purpose of deceiving the person they're dealing with.

More often the case is that they are lying for their family or the state rather than just lying for their own sakes. This is a traditional disposition for the Chinese that is difficult to shake, and if you don't know that, you won't be able to get the Chinese understanding of history.

Kitamura

It's in *The Analects*, too. There's account in chapter thirteen where Confucius said that the son who reported his father for stealing a sheep should have concealed his father's disgrace. If you have the *bihui* way of thinking, you can agree to all the Chinese understanding of history. As for a relationship with two sides, they turn it around 180 degrees toward anyone who temporarily disrupts their stability, thoroughly attacking, and they look down on their opponent even if they have to lie to do it.

Lin

That's right. It's also fine to lie to do away with your opponent. At the time of the Tiananmen Incident, too, Beijing residents saw American television networks say that 30,000 had been killed. I was near Tiananmen when it happened, too, and that many didn't die. It was students in particular, but a fair number of common city folk were killed.

Kitamura

I wonder if about 300 died. Many of the students were children of Party officials, so attacking them would have been a problem. Seen from the point of the students, however, the Communist Party was suppressing the democratic movement and was "the enemy," so it was acceptable to use any lie necessary to bring it down. At that time, a fax came in to a university in Kyoto where a colleague was working. The one who sent it was a medical student in Tiananmen Square. He wrote that even though the medical care group they had set up was about to evacuate the square, army units were firing straight into them. A student said it, so we thought it was true. It was, in fact, a lie, however. It was a falsehood made in hatred of the Communist Party.

Lin

The Communist Party lies, too. It is said that 70 million people starved to death because of Mao Zedong. At first they said it was several hundred thousand, then 10 million, then it grew to 30 million, and finally it became 70 million. (Laughs.)

The tradition of the patriotic lie

Kitamura

Jung Chang and Jon Halliday's book *Mao* is the same way. Upon causing families to be destroyed by the Cultural Revolution, they turned on Mao Zedong, who'd been worshipped like a god until that point, and attacked him. There was a considerable number of pointless bits in the criticism, however. I think it's all mixed in with a "literary creation." To say nothing of the "Rape of Nanking," which was committed by their bitter enemies,

the Japanese army; the Chinese escalate it as much as they want. It was said that 300,000 Chinese soldiers were casualties in the battles for Shanghai and Nanking, but before you knew it, that number started to stand on its own as the number of people killed in Nanking.

Lin

The average Chinese person doesn't believe that that many were killed. Claiming an inflated amount of harm is taken as a display of patriotism. It's called a "patriotic lie," and because of your love for your country, you lie to attack a person who has intended harm to your country. Saying that 30,000 were killed at Tiananmen is the same. So even if you think that it's a lie, you can't deny it. If you did something like that, you'd be called a traitor.

Kitamura

I notice that the spirit of *bihui* also exists in the thoroughly Confucianized nation of Korea. There was that incident with Professor Hwang Woo-suk, who fabricated his embryonic stem cell research and was forced out of Seoul National University. The group supporting Prof. Hwang charged that the chief investigator who condemned the work as fraud had defamed his reputation. To protect the country's honor it was necessary to hide the mistakes of a great scientist who was also a Nobel Prize nominee. That's also definitely in the spirit of *bihui*.

"Truth" is not important

Lin

I think that's the reason that "science" wasn't born in China. Science has one goal: the pursuit of truth. But the thing is, "truth" is just not important to the Chinese. For historians, the goal of historical study is supposed to be the pursuit of truth. The number one goal of Chinese historians — and this is not limited to the Communist Party — is the protection of the state.

Japanese have criticized Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking* as a historical fabrication. Her purpose in writing the book was not to study historical truth; it was to "edit" history out of a sense of patriotism. We knew from the start that it couldn't stand up to Western scientific evidence. Iris Chang, however, *bihui*'ed the truth for China, so for the Chinese, we can forget criticizing the falsehoods — it had to be praised. Actually, in China, she garnered a great deal of respect as a true patriot.

What this means is that in China, the tradition of *bihui* and science are antithetical. "Patriotic lies" from *bihui* are something the Japanese just can't accept.

Likewise, the "scientific evidence" advocated by the Japanese is something the Chinese can't accept.

Kitamura

If you think that way, you can understand the Chinese. Even for the "rape of Nanking" — the more people you say were killed, you more become a patriot who must be admired. That's why it's pretty much pointless to suggest a collaborative historical study between Japanese and Chinese. Even if Japanese were to go forward speaking from reason, the Chinese would not have it if there is something that is bad for their country.

I have been studying the relationship between the Guomindang and the Communist Party. There are very many researching the history of the Chinese Communist Party who also know the truth of the conflict between the two parties. When you talk to them unofficially, they'll agree, saying "yes, yes, that's right"; but no sooner than you get to a conference with them they seem to change. They straighten up and say something totally different. I was really surprised the first time it happened. "Hey, what the heck? That's not what you were saying last night."

You can say the same thing about studying the history of the Second Sino-Japanese War. It just gets terrible if you go off and say things like "why don't you tell the truth" or "you liar." You have to understand the other guy's position and consider what you can do not to lose.

"Thousand-year criminals"

Lin

And another thing. There's the way Chinese think about "crime." Westerners think that even if someone has committed a crime, they can expiate that crime. For example, you can receive judgment and serve your punishment, and when your time is up the crime has been paid for. On top of that, the crimes of dead people aren't an object of concern. Japanese think the same way. In traditional Chinese thought, however, your crimes are not wiped away even if you die. In China there is a saying: "thousand-year criminal" [古罪人, *qiān gǔ zuìrén*]. What this means is that even after a thousand years, someone's crimes will not be washed away. Thus for the Chinese, Japan's war crimes will be war crimes for ever. Even if you die, you will never be able to escape the prosecution of your war crimes. There is absolutely no forgiveness for one who has committed a war crime and then returns to the political world, to say nothing of being decorated. In the same way, Chinese believe that the "war crimes" committed by Japan are eternal and can never ever be expiated.

There are Japanese who ask, "how long will we have to apologize?" but as far as the Chinese are concerned, the Japanese have to keep on apologizing forever.

Kitamura

There are a lot of people in Japan even now who can only think within the framework of the Tokyo Trials. On that point, the Allies really hit the mark. (Laughs.) I think the Tokyo Trials were a very good thing as far as the Chinese Communist Party is concerned, so they really used the thinking of "aggressive war" well. That's why they can't think outside the framework of "aggressive war" and "war crimes." And that's why they always ask why we won't acknowledge Japanese aggression.

Redeemed by the Japanese army

Lin

The truth is, both the Communist Party and the Guomindang have many unfortunate and inconvenient things about them, and they've concealed them very well. Neither the Communist Party nor the Guomindang, however, has any need to perform *bihui* for the *other* party, so if you look at each party's documents, you'll see that they wrote about matters without mincing words.

The Guomindang wrote "the Communists did this bad thing," and the Communists

complained that “The Nationalists did that bad thing.” You can see the truth by reading both sides. That’s why you have to study the documents of both the Communist Party and the Guomindang.

Kitamura

There’s another horrid example. After Japan surrendered, a Communist army force lead by Lin Bao entered Manchuria and fought — and defeated — a Guomindang army. At that time, in September of 1945, the Guomindang was under an alliance treaty (signed on 14 August, 1945) with the Soviet Union wherein Stalin recognized Chiang Kai-shek as China’s leader. Given a situation where the Communist Party was thus under the Guomindang, it was not good that Lin Bao had moved on his own like that. That’s why in prominent history books edited by China’s National University of Defense Technology, Lin Bao’s army in Manchuria is variously called a Manchurian independence army or a Manchurian autonomous army — as if to say that it was a force independently organized by the Manchurians. I looked at Western studies of the event, and it’s not clear. That’s why if a text says that “it may have been” an independence force raised by Manchurians opposed to the methods of Chiang Kai-shek, it’s completely wrong. If you read studies put out in Taiwan, it was the Communist army, with Lin Bao hiding his name, that entered Manchuria.

Mao Zedong spoke with Chiang Kai-shek at the Chongqing Conference, where it was determined that the one who took Manchuria first would be the winner, so the Communist Party opposed the Guomindang and sent their army forth. In history books, however, they say that there was already an anti-Chiang force in Manchuria that hooked up with Lin Bao. They neatly conceal the true particulars.

Lin

While the Japanese are made out to be “aggressors who committed massacres” in the novel *Remembering 1942* [*Wēngǔ 1942*], by the Chinese writer Liu Zhenyun, he writes that the people of the farming villages, who suffered under the heavy taxation established by the Guomindang despite a serious famine that claimed three million lives, were actually *saved* by the rations handed out by the Japanese army. That’s why, he says, we cooperated with the Japanese army. He wrote a lot about the Japanese army, but because he criticized the Guomindang no one cared. We can understand even from this book, written under the Communist dictatorship, that the Japanese army didn’t do only bad things in the lands they occupied.

Kitamura

The Guomindang said they were fighting a war of resistance against “Japanese fascism,” but no one dares touch on the fact that the Guomindang had joined hands with fascist Japan’s ally — and history’s greatest criminals — Nazi Germany. For the Guomindang, it’s an embarrassing historical fact that they’d prefer remain a secret.

Lin

In the dispute between China and Japan concerning things like the responsibility for the war and the authenticity of the Nanking massacre, the countries’ respective principles and sense of moral values are completely different, so from the start their opinions will

likely not coincide.

Kitamura

They completely don't mesh, so the dispute itself gives you a sense of futility. Nonetheless, the Second Sino-Japanese War was fought on Chinese land, and we have to understand the Chinese people's fear since it is true that China became a battlefield.

For us, therefore, we have to get free from the thinking of the framework of the Tokyo Trials; and again, we have to read and understand correctly all the historical documents. While keeping in mind the Chinese peoples' "historical lies," of course.