

The Second Sino–Japanese War Was Caused by China
— A Criticism of the “Japan-as-Aggressor” View —
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— Summary —

In an Aug. 31, 1937, article in *The New York Times* by Shanghai correspondent Hallett Abend, we find the following:

“Opinions may differ regarding the responsibility for the opening of hostilities in the vicinity of Peiping early in July,” said one foreign official who was a participant in the conferences held here before Aug. 13, “but concerning the Shanghai hostilities the records will justify only one decision. The Japanese did not want a repetition of the fighting here and exhibited forbearance and patience and did everything possible to avoid aggravating the situation. But they were literally pushed into the clash by the Chinese, who seemed intent on involving the foreign area and foreign interests in this clash.”

Considering that *The New York Times* at that time generally maintained a distinct anti-Japan and pro-China stance, the significance of this article is that without doubt it was Chinese who initiated hostilities against Japan. This attack was neither sporadic nor partial, but a fully organized one with elite 30,000-strong divisions against a 4,200-man Japanese naval landing force stationed in the Shanghai concession for the protection of the 30,000 Japanese residents there. Since it was absolutely impossible to defend the concession with such a tiny landing force, Japan decided to dispatch two army divisions. This was not enough, however, as China mobilized its forces around Shanghai to 300,000, and the fighting escalated.

The Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the opening of hostilities in the vicinity of Peiping in early July, was also orchestrated by China. This is clearly written in the local cease-fire agreement that was concluded between Qin Dechun, acting commander of China’s 29th Route Army, and Matsui Kyûtarô, head of the Japanese Army Beijing Special Military Agency on July 11th, four days after the actual shooting incident. The first item on the three-item cease-fire agreement says: “The representative of the 29th Route Army expresses his regrets to the Japanese forces, and declares that those formerly responsible will be punished, and those who will in future be responsible will take precautions to never again provoke such an incident.” Communists who had infiltrated the 29th Route Army were the perpetrators of the shooting.

The Chinese thus bear the responsibility of the opening of the conflict in the Peiping area and the full scale assault in Shanghai. Moreover, Japanese forces stationed in Peiping and Shanghai were based on an internationally recognized agreement. According to the international law, therefore, the aggressor nation concerning the Sino–Japanese conflict is defined as China not Japan, even though the conflicts developed in China.

Japan proposed peace plans many times during the conflict, but Chiang Kai-shek’s government rejected all of them, even if no territorial or special interest requests were included in them.

The only conclusion is that it is unfair to condemn Japan as an aggressor nation against China for the Second Sino–Japanese War.