

#### 4. THE TANAKA MEMORIAL HOAX

##### **Fabrication of a historical document**

Because of its connection with the Eastern Conference, I would like to discuss a mysterious document that was widely circulated, even making an appearance at the IMTFE (Tokyo Trial), held after the Greater East Asian War had ended. The document is also known as the “Tanaka Memorandum,” but is most often referred to as the “Tanaka Memorial.” It is said to elaborate on decisions made at the Eastern Conference, and was supposedly written by Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi and secretly submitted to Emperor Shōwa. Along with the memorial, entitled “Assertive Policies Toward Manchuria and Mongolia,” Tanaka is said to have delivered another document entitled “Fundamental Assertive Imperial Policies Concerning Manchuria and Mongolia” to Imperial Household Minister Ichiki Kitokurō on July 25, 1927.

This mysterious document became known to the world in December 1929, more than two years after it was purportedly written. It appeared in *Current Affairs Monthly*,<sup>1</sup> a magazine published in Nanjing, in Chinese, and subsequently metamorphosed into an English-language pamphlet, which was disseminated all over the world. The memorial made its rounds to China, Europe, and the US, in both Chinese and English. One would expect to find the original Japanese text of any memorial to the Emperor, even a draft, but no trace of the document in question has ever been found. Accordingly, it was suspect from the outset, but since it was promoted, time and again, as the consummate anti-Japanese resource, it took on a life of its own, acquiring historical gravitas.<sup>2</sup> It is eerily similar to another phenomenon, the manufactured “Nanking massacre” with its imaginary 300,000 victims, and which, propelled by worldwide Chinese propaganda, has become firmly established in people’s minds as historical fact.

##### **Memorial finally appears in Japanese**

The first Japanese translation of the Tanaka Memorial was published in 1930, the year after its appearance in Chinese. Entitled “Japan’s Policy Toward Manchuria and Mongolia in the Eyes of the Chinese,” it was issued by the Nikka (Japan-China) Club. The translation was based on the version carried by the aforementioned *Current Affairs Monthly* under the title “Shocking Japanese Policy Concerning Manchuria and Mongolia: The Tanaka Memorial.”

There is one other Japanese-language version, entitled *Japanese Imperialist Conspiracy: Translation of Memorial on Invasion of Manchuria in Its Entirety Submitted by Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi to the Emperor of Japan*. It was published in 1946 by Iskra, a company operating under the auspices of the Comintern.<sup>3</sup> This version was represented as a reprint of a translation, done by the JCP (Japanese Communist Party) in 1931 or 1932, of an article in the December 1931

---

<sup>1</sup> *Shishi yuebao* (Current affairs monthly), vol. 1, No. 2 (1929).

<sup>2</sup> Inō Tentarō, “‘Tanaka jōsōbun’ wo meguru ni san no mondai” (Several problems relating to the “Tanaka Memorial”) in *Kokusai seiji* (International politics) 26 (1964).

<sup>3</sup> <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/api/iiiiif/1445068/R0000002/full/full/0/default.jpg>.

issue of *Communist International*.<sup>4</sup> (The memorial that appeared in *Communist International* was written in English, and was the same version published in English in the *China Critic*.)<sup>5</sup>

### **“Positive” policy toward Manchuria and Mongolia**

What sort of contrivance was the Tanaka Memorial? I shall provide a summary, using excerpts for illustration. The memorial commences as follows:

#### THE TANAKA MEMORIAL

Memorial Presented to the Emperor of  
Japan on July 25, 1927  
By Premier Tanaka,  
Outlining the Positive Policy in Manchuria

The term Manchuria and Mongolia includes the provinces Fengtien [Fengtian], Kirin [Jilin], Heilungkiang [Heilongjiang] and Outer and Inner Mongolia. It extends an area of 74,000 square miles, having a population of 28,000,000 people. ... [I]ts wealth of forestry, minerals and agricultural products is also unrivaled elsewhere in the world. In order to exploit these resources for the perpetuation of our national glory, we created especially the South Manchuria Railway Company.

The total investment involved in our undertakings in railway, shipping, mining, forestry, steel manufacture, agriculture, and in cattle raising, as schemes pretending to be mutually beneficial to China and Japan, amount to no less than Yen 440,000,000. It is veritably the largest single investment and the strongest organization of our country. (...) In so far as the South Manchuria Railway Company is empowered to undertake diplomatic, police, and ordinary administrative functions so that it may *carry out our imperialistic policies* [italics supplied], the Company forms a peculiar organization which has exactly the same powers as the Governor-General of Korea.

(...)

It will be recalled that when the Nine Power Treaty was signed which restricted our movements in Manchuria and Mongolia, public opinion was greatly aroused. The late Emperor Taisho called a conference of *Yamagata and other high officers of the army and navy to find a way to counteract this new engagement* [italics supplied]. I was sent to Europe and America to ascertain secretly the attitude of the important statesmen toward it.

(...)

---

<sup>4</sup> “Japanese Imperialism in All Its Insolent Nakedness,” *Communist International*, vol. VIII, No. 22, 30 December 1931, 731-748; <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/ci/vol-8/v08-n22-dec-30-1931-CI-riaz-orig.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> *China Critic*, 24 September 1931, vol. 4, no. 29, 923-34.

After I had secretly exchanged views with the Powers regarding the development of Manchuria and Mongolia, I returned by way of Shanghai. At the wharf there *a Chinese* [italics supplied] attempted to take my life. An American woman was hurt, but I escaped by the divine protection of my emperors of the past. It seems that it was by divine will ... .

(...)

The Three Eastern Provinces are politically the imperfect spot in the Far East. For the sake of self-protection as well as the protection of others, Japan cannot remove the difficulties in Eastern Asia unless she adopts a policy of “Blood and Iron.” But in carrying out this policy we have to face the United States which has been turned against us by China’s policy of fighting poison with poison. ... But in order to conquer China we must first conquer Manchuria and Mongolia. In order to conquer the world, we must first conquer China. If we succeed in conquering China, the rest of the Asiatic countries and the South Sea countries will fear us and surrender to us. Then the world will realize that Eastern Asia is ours and will not dare to violate our rights. This is the plan left to us by Emperor Meiji, the success of which is essential to our national existence.

The way to gain actual rights in Manchuria and Mongolia is to use this region as a base and under the pretense of trade and commerce penetrate the rest of China. Armed by the rights already secured we shall seize the resources all over the country. Having China’s entire resources at our disposal we shall proceed to conquer India, the Archipelago, Asia Minor, Central Asia, and even Europe. But to get control of Manchuria and Mongolia is the first step if the Yamato race wishes to distinguish themselves on Continental Asia.<sup>6</sup>

### **Bizarre Chinese logic**

Was the Tanaka Memorial, which even made an appearance at the IMTFE, genuine or spurious? Qin Dechun, deputy commander of the 29<sup>th</sup> Army and mayor of Beijing when the Lugou Bridge Incident occurred, was a witness for the prosecution during that tribunal. Here is the exchange between the witness and defense attorney Hayashi Itsurō:

Q: You have spoken of having seen the TANAKA Memorial. In what language was this so-called memorial written?

A: What I saw was the Chinese translation.

Q: Have you ever ascertained whether there was a Japanese text of this so-called memorial?

A: I have not seen the original Japanese version of the memorandum.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Carl Crow, ed., *Japan’s Dream of World Empire: The Tanaka Memorial* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942), 7-9.

<sup>7</sup> IMTFE, Cross-examination of Ching-teh Chun (Qin Dechun), witness for the prosecution, by Hayashi Itsurō on 24 July 1946, 2,460; <https://archive.org/details/121.2193-2377/118.2931-2990/page/16/mode/2up?q=memorial>.

Qin had begun to doubt the authenticity of the memorial, which he had been the first to mention.

During further cross-examination on the following day, William Webb, president of the tribunal, interrupted the proceedings and asked if the witness had any confidence in the existence of the “Tanaka Memorial.”

A: I cannot prove that it is a true one, but at the same time I also have no means to disprove it. But as the development we have witnessed in the latter stages of Japanese aggression it seems to me that the author TANAKA had made himself a very good profit.

This testimony was revised by the monitor (language arbiter), whose responsibility was to correct translation errors.

THE MONITOR: English supplements: If TANAKA Memorial was untrue, was cooked up, everything predicted in it has been carried out.<sup>8</sup>

Incidentally, when the League of Nations was debating the Manchurian Incident at the 69<sup>th</sup> session of the Council of the League of Nations in November 1932, Wellington Koo, a Chinese delegate, referred to the Tanaka Memorial. When Matsuoka Yōsuke, representing Japan, pressed Koo on the document’s authenticity, the latter’s argument was, “In my opinion, however, the best proof on this question is really the whole situation in Manchuria today.”<sup>9</sup>

When it proved difficult to ascertain that the memorial existed, the Chinese resorted a bizarre logic that conflated the past and future. They insisted that the document was authentic on the basis of subsequent developments (which were, in fact, far removed from the content of the memorial) both at the time of the Manchurian Incident and at the IMTFE.

### **Evidence exposing memorial as a forgery**

In February 1930, the Japanese Foreign Ministry, having concluded that the Tanaka Memorial was a fake, filed a protest to the Nationalist government. In June of the same year the Japan-China Club arrived at the same conclusion after having translated the memorial into Japanese. Later Hanabusa Nagamichi, Kiyosawa Kiyoshi, and other specialists in diplomatic history also adjudged the document spurious, as did Shigemitsu Mamoru, who was in the diplomatic service at the time the memorial was invented, and other Foreign Ministry officials as well.

---

<sup>8</sup> IMTFE, Interrogation of Ching-teh Chun (Qin Dechun), witness for the prosecution, by President William Webb on 25 July 1946, 2,515-2516; <https://archive.org/details/121.2193-2377/119.12-82/mode/2up?q=tanaka>.

<sup>9</sup> Westel W. Willoughby, *Japan’s Case Examined* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1940), 164.

There is no shortage of reasons on which to base such a conclusion, but I would like to indicate several convincing examples, among which are portions of the text that are offset by italics.

- (1) According to the memorial, Yamagata Aritomo attended a meeting convened in late November 1922 to find a solution to the problems posed by the Nine-Power Treaty. Yamagata died on February 1, 1922.
- (2) According to the memorial, Tanaka Giichi was dispatched to Europe and the US. But in 1922 his only foreign destination was, in fact, the Philippines.
- (3) The perpetrators of the unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Tanaka Giichi in Shanghai were not Chinese, but Koreans.

The following items have no connection with passages italicized above.

- (4) The Fengtian-Jilin Line, already in operation according to the memorial, was not completed until May 1929.
- (5) Memorials were customarily not addressed to any individual, but rather delivered to the Emperor by the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal. The Tanaka Memorial is addressed to the Imperial Household Minister.

Even on the basis of factual and stylistic errors alone, the “Tanaka Memorial” is certainly a fake. Also suspicious are numerous awkward, peculiar or otherwise inappropriate turns of phrase. The writing style of the memorial lacks courtliness and humility to the extent that it seems irredeemably peculiar and foreign to the Japanese sensibility, and thus unacceptable as suitable phraseology for such a document. I am certain beyond any doubt that the original author was not Japanese. The forgery of the memorial should be viewed as a manifestation of the rampant Chinese tendency toward prevarication, and should serve as valuable evidence in any examination of the authenticity of the so-called Nanjing massacre.