

1. THE TANGGU TRUCE

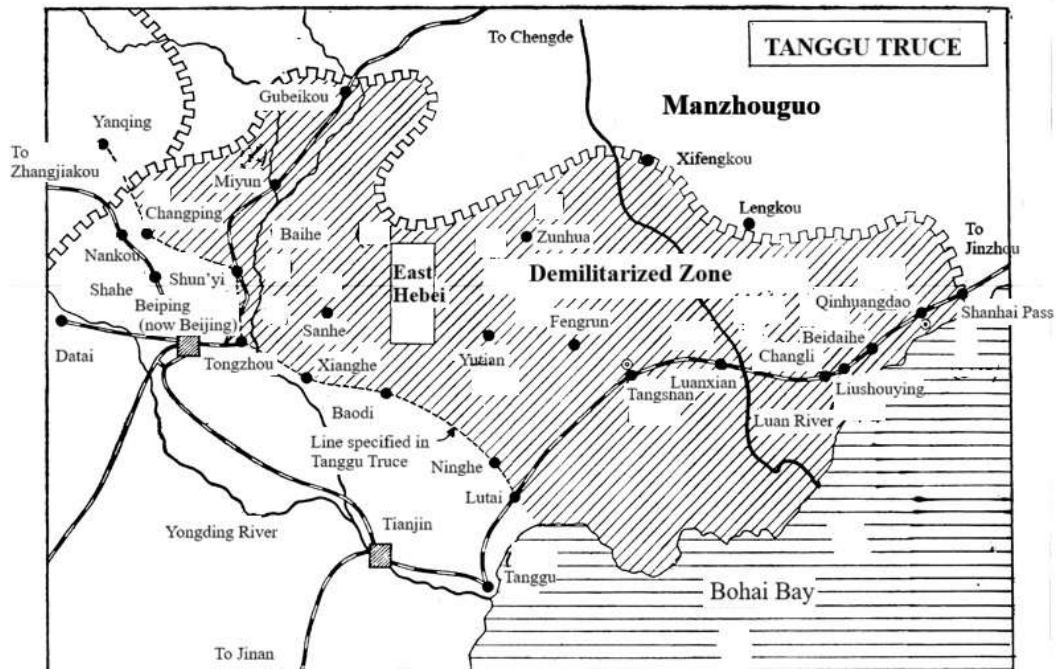
Emperor's concerns about Operation Rehe

The path leading from the Manchurian Incident to the 2nd Sino-Japanese War was anything but straightforward. Beginning with this chapter, I shall describe the Lugou Bridge Incident, which triggered the war, placing it in the proper historical context. To accomplish that task, it will be necessary to return to a period several years prior to the Manchurian Incident. To shed light on the situation at that time, it is essential to provide an overview of developments in Japan-China relations, particularly those that concern North China, as well as the communist movement in China.

Manzhouguo was established in March 1932. But in the ensuing years, bandits continued to run rampant in the region — more than 200,000 of them. The Japanese Guandong Army launched punitive expeditions against them, and as a result, by February 1933 most of the bandits had been expelled or eliminated.

Meanwhile Zhang Xueliang, who had been driven out of Manchuria, managed to form a volunteer army 40,000 men strong. He proceeded to invade Rehe province, where he organized a base of operations for anti-Manzhouguo and anti-Japanese activity. It was there, in the beginning of February 1933, that the Guandong Army launched Operation Rehe, whose objective was to expel Zhang's forces, which were the main cause of turmoil in Manzhouguo. The Japanese speedily routed the Chinese, and, by early March, had taken control of the Great Wall's key passes. The Nationalist government's finance minister, T.V. Soong, expressed his surprise at the relentless Japanese advance by quoting a Chinese classic: "Train an army for a thousand days to use it for one morning." Japanese soldiers were given strict orders not to cross to the Chinese side of the Great Wall during Operation Rehe. Furthermore, Commander Mutō Nobuyoshi issued the following secret directive on February 19, which strictly forbade his men from venturing south of the Great Wall.

"The operation at hand concerns Manzhouguo and only Manzhouguo. Provoking war with China is contrary to national policy. ... Rehe province is Manzhouguo territory. Within its borders our forces may act at their discretion. However, Hebei province, situated beyond the Great Wall, is Republic of China territory. We may not take operational action in Hebei in the absence of imperial orders. We must be vigilant and avoid being distracted by changes in local circumstances or by strategic advantages. We must make every possible effort to avoid losing sight of the broad perspective and acting in a way that is contrary to national policy, even when under extreme provocation. The garrison in the vicinity of the Shanhai Pass area must be especially vigilant, taking care not to exceed established boundaries. Having heard the concerns of His Majesty, the Supreme Commander, I humbly issue these instructions."¹



Obviously, the commander in chief of the Guandong Army had been thoroughly briefed about Emperor Showa's concerns. Accordingly, he prohibited his men from advancing beyond the Great Wall into China proper.

The instructions he received clearly communicate the Emperor's desire to avoid war with China, as well as the commander's own genuine wish to avoid overstepping the bounds of his orders. But the cruelty of history is such that Japan's goodwill and peaceful intentions alone could not prevent the outbreak of war.

Circumstances compel Japanese to cross Great Wall

In mid-March, the Nationalist government dismissed Zhang Xueliang and, in his stead, appointed He Yingqin as head of the Beiping Branch of the Military Affairs Commission. It then ordered the 50,000-man Central Army, to advance northwards. Until the end of April, the Guandong Army was struggling in the face of a fierce Chinese Central Army counteroffensive at every major pass along the Great Wall. The Japanese were experiencing such difficulties in part because the Chinese had the advantage of being able to look down on them from the Great Wall. To gain the advantage, the Japanese had only one strategic option: advance, at least to some extent, south of the Great Wall. Thus, Operation Rehe and Operation Great Wall Line compelled the Japanese to move beyond the Great Wall, whether they wished to or not.

Once the Japanese had occupied key passes, the 20-division Central Army, realizing that the Japanese would stop short of the Great Wall, assembled in the Pingjin area and made repeated attempts to recapture the positions they had lost. For instance, at Lengkou Pass (to the north of the

Jianchang barracks), the Chinese penetrated deeply into Rehe province with as many as 7,000 men. At that point, the Japanese had no choice but to cross the Great Wall. In mid-April, they broke through it at Lengkou Pass and Xifengkou, and pursued the Chinese toward the Luan River. Thus, the determination of the Guandong Army officials notwithstanding, the Japanese were provoked into expanding their theater to include the interior of the passes.

Then suddenly, on April 19, during the surging Japanese advance, an order to withdraw north of the Great Wall was issued, and all units immediately returned to Rehe province. According to a journal kept by Chief Aide-de-Camp Honjō Shigeru and other sources, on April 18 Emperor Showa, concerned about the Guandong Army's moving south of the Great Wall, spoke to Honjō: "Why not order the Guandong Army to halt its advance?" When Honjō conveyed His Majesty's wishes to Deputy Chief of Staff Masaki Jinzaburō, who was so deeply affected that he not only had a personal letter in which he described the Emperor's wishes delivered to the Guandong Army commander in chief, but also wired the Guandong Army chief of staff, ordering him to withdraw his troops immediately. That was the order for the Japanese to move away from the Great Wall, interrupting the hostilities, as described above.²

Chinese provoke Japanese into crossing Great Wall

Unfortunately, the Chinese did not discern the desire on the part of Japanese troops to make peace. After suffering a punishing attack in the area east of the Luan River, the Chinese retreated to the right bank of that river. When the Japanese withdrew to an area north of the Great Wall, the Chinese pursued them and again challenged them in the area east of the Luan River. If after withdrawing, the Japanese allowed the Chinese to continue with their provocative behavior, there would never be peace on the Manchurian-Chinese border. Chief of Staff Koiso Kuniaki, who had traveled to Tokyo, received permission from His Majesty and Army authorities to advance, once again, to the area east of the Luan River. On May 7 the Guandong Army initiated multiple offensives against Chinese units that were now in the area east of the Luan River. On the following day the Japanese commanding officer issued a statement placing the responsibility for the hostilities on the behavior of the Chinese — the contemptuous stance they had adopted when they realized that the Japanese would not advance beyond the Great Wall. Now the Japanese offensive beyond the Great Wall began in earnest. The Japanese crossed the Luan River and pursued the Chinese with accelerating momentum. Japanese forces from Gubeikou also advanced beyond the Great Wall, throwing the Pingjin region into a state of acute panic. By May 23, Beiping (Beijing) was within striking distance. At this juncture the Chinese were helpless. On May 25 He Yingqin dispatched an emissary to Miyun with a formal ceasefire proposal. The Guandong Army halted combat operations. The operation conducted south of the Great Wall had come to an end.

² Honjō Shigeru, "Shihishō," (Selections from private memoirs) *Honjō nikki* (Honjō diary) (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1967).

Conclusion of ceasefire agreement

On May 31, 1933 Maj.-Gen. Okumura Yasuji, Guandong Army deputy chief of staff, and Lt.-Gen. Xiong Bin, chief of staff, Beiping Branch Military Council signed a ceasefire agreement at Tanggu, commonly referred to as the Tanggu Truce. Its essential points follow:

1. The Chinese army shall immediately withdraw to the regions west and south of the line from Yenching [Yanqing] to ... Tungchow [Tongzhou] ... and Lutai, and undertakes not to advance beyond that line, and to avoid any provocation of hostilities.
2. [Omitted]
3. The Japanese army, after ascertaining the withdrawal of the Chinese army to the line stated in Article 1, undertakes not to cross the said line and not to continue to attack the Chinese troops, and shall voluntarily withdraw, in general, to the Great Wall.
4. In the regions to the south of the Great Wall and to the north and east of the line defined in Article 1, the maintenance of peace and order shall be undertaken by the Chinese police force. The said police force shall not be constituted of armed units hostile to Japanese feelings.
5. [Omitted]³

By the beginning of August Japanese troops had, for the most part, returned to their positions north of the Great Wall.

The Tanggu Truce specified that a demilitarized zone would be established in the northeast corner of Hebei province. In 1935, when the Umezu-He Agreement was signed, the zone was expanded to include all of Hebei province, and it was under these circumstances that the Guandong Army's plan to divide and conquer North China moved forward.

In short, the conclusion of the T'angku Truce marked the first step of the Japanese army into North China.⁴

There is nothing surprising about this opinion, found in the *China Quagmire*, a study published by the Japan Association of International Relations. Still, we must not forget that it was the hateful, provocative stance adopted by the Chinese that drove the Guandong Army to expand its Rehe operation south of the Great Wall.

Legacy of the Tanggu Truce

As one might expect, the Tanggu Truce clearly delineated the border between Manchuria and China and provided, to some extent, a resolution of the Manchurian Incident. Why, then, did it

³ James William Morley, ed., *The China Quagmire: Japan's Expansion on the Asian Continent 1933-1941* (selected translations from Nihon Kokusai Seiji Gakkai (Japan Association of International Relations), *Taiheiyō sensō e no michi: kaisen gaikō shi, daisankan* (Japan's road to the Pacific War: diplomatic history, vol. 3) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 59-60.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

not put a complete end to disputes between Japan and China? Why did disputes in the demilitarized zone specified in the treaty arise between the two nations, and soon culminate in the 2nd Sino-Japanese War?

This is a sensitive question. When it was posed to Gen. Ishiwara Kanji after the Greater East Asian War had ended, his reply was, “The Tanggu Truce was a success in that it offered a local resolution to the conflict between Japan and China. However, it should have gone further, including provisions for diplomatic negotiations resulting in a promise (even a tacit one) from Chiang Kai-shek to put a halt to anti-Japanese activity, initiate Japan-China joint efforts to combat communism, and recognize Manzhouguo. The slipshod efforts on the part of the leadership were certainly a primary cause of the ensuing war.”⁵ In 1940 Maj.-Gen. Kawabe Torashirō, head of the War Leadership Council (later promoted to colonel), also commented on the treaty as follows: “There is more than one explanation for the outbreak of the 2nd Sino-Japanese War. But ultimately, it comes down to the fact that there was no political resolution of the Manchurian Incident.” Kawabe described the Tanggu Truce as “a stopgap ceasefire pact between the north China branch of the Nationalist government’s Military Affairs Commission and the Guandong Army.”

It is certainly true that, prior to the conclusion of the treaty, the Japanese had the upper hand, being within striking distance and poised to gain control of Beijing as they were. Therefore, the drafting of the treaty would have presented an ideal opportunity not only to conclude a ceasefire agreement, but also to reach a political settlement, which would include the recognition of Manzhouguo. But the Guandong Army was satisfied with having obtained a treaty that gave *de facto* recognition of Manzhouguo’s borders. It is easy, in hindsight, to be critical about unresolved problems. Nevertheless, a fair evaluation of the situation cannot be made without considering the circumstances that compelled the Guandong Army to end its operations south of the Great Wall early and decide upon a ceasefire. Among them were its grossly inferior military strength compared with the Chinese forces, and the concerns of the Emperor and military authorities about advancing south of the Great Wall.

⁵ Tsunoda Jun, *Ishiwara Kanji shiryō* (Documents pertaining to Ishiwara Kanji) (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1967).