

2. FABRICATION OF THE “JAPANESE PLOT” THEORY

Recollections of Jin Zhenzhong: an exercise in mendacity

Three theories have been posited in connection with the Lugou Bridge Incident: (1) the CCP conspiracy theory, (2) the Japanese military conspiracy theory, and (3) the accidental assault theory. All of Japan’s history textbooks support the accidental assault theory. The official Chinese historical view favors, as one would expect, the Japanese military conspiracy theory, which explains why the Okuno Statement (May 1988) became so controversial.¹

However, the Chinese position, the Japanese military conspiracy theory, is totally ludicrous. By way of illustration, I would like to examine “Recollections of Jin Zhenzhong” (commander of the Wanping Garrison), which appeared in *Chūō Kōron*, a Japanese literary monthly.² Though ostensibly a historical research resource, Jin’s “recollections” are, in actuality, an example of prodigious historical falsification.

I would like to cite a few of those falsifications. Jin reports witnessing Japanese soldiers engaged in firing maneuvers at Lugou Bridge on July 6, the day before the incident. He claims to have heard the “rumbling of tanks approaching” from behind the Japanese soldiers, implying that Japanese tanks were already at the site of the incident and conducting offensive maneuvers on July 6! It is true that one company in the China Garrison Army’s tank corps, which participated in the July 28 Nanyuan offensive, was stationed in Tianjin at the time. But there is absolutely no evidence corroborating the accusation that it was deployed to Lugou Bridge at the time of the incident, much less the day before. To bolster their Japanese military conspiracy theory, the Chinese have introduced Japanese tanks, figments of their own imaginations, and inserted them into the historical record. This is worse than distortion of historical fact. It is fabrication and falsification of historical fact, which the Chinese are attempting to fob off as evidence. Decades in the future, who will question the credibility of this “resource?” The notion that the Japanese military had tanks ready to invade China as early as July 6 will have become established as historical fact.

This is a very serious matter. The Japanese must refute these Chinese perversions of history without delay. Otherwise, their fictions will ultimately be viewed as historical fact, and the consequent irreparable damage will place an unbearable burden on Japan’s future generations. Jin maintains that Japanese soldiers conducting maneuvers on a pitch-black, rainy night were planning to launch a surprise attack on Wanping Fortress. Compare this with Capt. Shimizu’s diary

¹ Okuno Seisuke, director-general of the National Land Agency (1987-88), was forced to resign from that post when the PRC objected to his quoting from a book written by Edwin O. Reischauer, former US ambassador to Japan, who stated that the Lugou Bridge Incident was the result of accidental events. Reischauer wrote: “On the night of July 7, 1937, fighting broke out accidentally between Japanese and Chinese forces near Peking.” Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 100.

² “Recollections of Jin Zhenzhong,” memoir-style article attributed to Jin Zhenzhong, published in *Chūō Kōron*, December 1987.

entry: “On that night there was absolutely no wind. There was no moon, but the sky was clear. The walls of the Wanping Fortress were faintly visible in the distance against the starry sky.” Was it a dark, rainy night, or was it a clear night with the sky full of stars? The July 8 entry in the daily logbook kept by the Special Service Agency in Beiping, an impartial, chronological record of events, reads: “fair, then cloudy, then rainy.” Since its description of the Lugou Bridge Incident in the logbook begins at 12:10 a.m. on July 8, we know that the skies were clear on the night of July 7. Since he was the commander of the local garrison, Jin Zhenzhong could not have forgotten what the weather was like on the day of the incident. Therefore, we can assume that “pitch-black rainy night” was an invention intended to lend credence to the Japanese military conspiracy theory.

This is the same ploy favored by Chinese history textbook authors, who altered the account of the 1927 Nanjing Incident by changing the time frame of the British and American shelling from afternoon to night (see Chapter 9, Section 1). We should be mindful of this shameless Chinese tactic of distorting history, whereby even descriptions of natural phenomena are changed to suit the fabricators’ purposes.

Who fired the first shot, the Japanese or the Chinese? On this point, Jin Zhenzhong’s “recollections” are truly astonishing.

At around 11:00 p.m. on July 7, a series of shots suddenly reverberated from the direction of the Japanese army’s training location. Shortly thereafter, I received a telephone call from Section Chief Xu of the Hebei-Chahar Pacification Office. He said, “The Japanese are demanding entry into the fortress to search for a soldier. They are claiming that Chinese troops took him inside Wanping during the Japanese training exercises.” The fact that the Japanese army was conducting training exercises within the security perimeter at Wanping Fortress on this pitch-black, rainy night proves that they were planning to launch a surprise attack on Wanping. ... I told Section Chief Xu not to believe the Japanese lies. Just as I hung up the telephone, there was a burst of intense gunfire. Japanese shells flew over the walls of Wanping, destroying six rooms in our battalion headquarters, and killing two soldiers and wounding five.³

This account would have us believe that Japanese soldiers suddenly shelled Wanping Fortress after 11:00 p.m. on July 7, without provocation and without warning, resulting in casualties. I have already provided proof that this claim is a shameless prevarication, i.e., that the Japanese did not return fire, not even once, after first being fired at unlawfully by Chinese troops on the riverbank after 10:00 p.m., until 5:30 the next morning. Furthermore, since the Japanese artillery unit did not arrive on the scene until 3:20 a.m. on July 8, it could not possibly have fired on Wanping at 11:00 p.m. on July 7.

There is another significant falsehood in Jin’s “recollections” to which I would like to draw readers’ attention.

³ Ibid.

At around 6:00 on the morning of July 8, the Japanese demanded permission to enter the Wanping Fortress to search for a missing soldier. They told us that if we refused, they would let loose with artillery fire and reduce the fortress to ashes.

“Record of the July 7 Incident,” which Qin Dechun submitted as evidence to the IMTFE, gives the time at “around 5:00 a.m.” but otherwise, its content is basically the same as that of Jin’s recollections. Consequently, we may assume that Qin’s account formed the basis for the subsequent official Chinese historical perception of the Lugou Bridge Incident. However, the missing soldier had rejoined his unit by 11:00 p.m. on July 7, 20 hours earlier, and the Japanese had advised Wanping Mayor Wang Lengzhai of his return at 2:00 a.m. on July 8, which *Wang mentions in Qin’s account*. It is glaringly obvious that given these events, the Japanese would never have demanded entry to the Wanping Fortress at 6:00 a.m., four hours later, on the pretext of searching for that missing soldier. This is especially true because Wang Lengzhai, who had been informed that the missing soldier had been located, was in the fortress at 5:00 a.m. with the Japanese envoys. This lie is so bald-faced that it might even be considered amusing.

Jin Zhenzhong goes on to write the following:

Unable to suppress my anger when confronted with the Japanese illegal demand for entry, I responded as follows:

- (1) Fengtai is 8 *li*⁴ away from Lugou Bridge. The Japanese Army must have had malicious intentions, because they entered our security perimeter to conduct maneuvers *on a rainy night* [italics supplied].
- (2) The Japanese claimed that *one of their soldiers was missing* [italics supplied], but what evidence did they have? Even if they were telling the truth, this was their responsibility, not ours.
- (3) When the Japanese shelled Wanping Fortress last night, they created a scene of sheer destruction. Houses were blown up, and there were both civilian and military casualties. The Japanese should compensate us *for our losses* [italics supplied].

Not one of the italicized portions of Jin’s “rebuttal” is based on fact. Therefore, the rebuttal *per se* is a fabrication. Jin digs himself deeper in an attempt to maintain his deception. Publishing such documents and calling them “historical resources” serves only to bring humiliation and ridicule onto the Chinese people.

Why the Japanese did not anticipate the incident

Evidence exists that demonstrates beyond any doubt that the Lugou Bridge Incident was not the product of some Japanese scheme. For instance, the men in the Shimizu Company carried blank cartridges. Each of them also carried 30 rounds of live ammunition as a precaution. However, those live rounds were carefully packed so as not to be immediately usable, even by mistake. Sgt. Abe

⁴ Approximately 4,000 meters.

Kyūroku, who was responsible for the company's weapons, described the prevailing weapons protocol as follows:

According to the rules, during maneuvers five blank cartridges were issued for each rifle, as well as 30 live rounds for security reasons, as this was an overseas assignment with special circumstances. One hundred twenty live rounds were issued for light machine guns. However, the live rounds were packed in sturdy cardboard in sets of 15, and cotton twine was tightly wrapped around them to prevent them from being opened impulsively. Two boxes containing a total of 30 rounds were carried in ammunition pouches. Live rounds were placed in the left pouch, and blanks in the right. That way, even in the dark, it was impossible to mistake live rounds for blanks. Furthermore, the system was designed so that live rounds could not be used unless there was an unambiguous order from the company commander to that effect. The rules were even more stringent for light machine guns: there were live ammunition barrels and blank ammunition barrels. Since the blank ammunition barrels were always attached, no one in his right mind could mistake live rounds for blank cartridges.⁵

I have confirmed the information provided above directly with Sgt. Abe.

Other soldiers in the 8th Company provided similar accounts, confirming that Japanese military procedures were designed in such a way as to prevent live ammunition from being used by mistake in the absence of an order from a superior officer. Such rules demonstrate the meticulous precautions taken by the Japanese to prevent the misuse of live ammunition. Such a high level of caution would be highly unlikely if the unit's mission had been creating a pretext for war. In contrast, there was an egregious lack of discipline among Chinese troops, who did not use blank cartridges, and who habitually fired indiscriminately without orders or permission from their superiors.

The Japanese bore no obligation to notify the Chinese of maneuvers using blank cartridges. But they responded to a special request from the Chinese by reporting, on July 4, that night maneuvers would take place at Lugou Bridge on July 7.⁶ Additionally, more than 200 Chinese soldiers who had begun working on the embankment during daylight hours were watching the Shimizu Company as it conducted those maneuvers. They could not possibly have mistaken those exercises for actual combat.

Moreover, the company's men were not carrying steel helmets during that night's maneuvers. Company Commander Shimizu had instructed his men not to take steel helmets with them. With a company training inspection scheduled for two days later, he did not want them to overexert themselves. Japanese soldiers thus became enmeshed in a conflict with Chinese troops without the

⁵ *Shōwa shi no Tennō* (The Emperor in the Shōwa era), vol. 15 (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbunsha, 1967-1980).

⁶ Teradaira Tadasuke, *Rokōkyō jiken: Nihon no higeki* (The Lugou Bridge Incident: a tragedy for Japan) (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbunsha, 1970).



Top: 1st Lt. Noji Ishichi (back to camera), instructor of 8th Company recruits, negotiating with Chinese for passage through Wanping Fortress, on the way to the firing practice site.

Bottom: 8th Company passing through Wanping Fortress on its way to maneuvers. Both photographs (taken in c. May 1937) were provided by Sgt. Abe Kyūroku, who was responsible for 8th Company weapons.

benefit of steel helmets. Commander Shimizu wrote in his journal that “this was a shameful blunder, the underestimation of a volatile situation.” But the fact that the 8th Company was not equipped with steel helmets is proof that the unit had no expectations of engaging in combat with Chinese troops.

I would also like to offer an additional piece of information, one that is not widely known. The 8th Company was not carrying its codebooks. The codebooks for the local Kawabe Brigade had been revised in June 1937, the month before the incident, and were scheduled to be distributed to subordinate units. On the evening of July 8, the day after the incident, brigade headquarters advanced to Fengtai without the new codebooks, which remained in a steel trunk at the headquarters in Dong Jiaomin Xiang (the Beiping Legation Quarter). It is likely that the adjutant or the relevant non-commissioned officer left the codebooks behind when the headquarters moved because he expected the incident to be resolved quickly, as previous incidents had been. Therefore, when the Lugou Bridge Incident escalated, brigade headquarters were forced to send and receive messages using radiotelephones or mirror writing. The revised codebooks were finally delivered to the brigade on July 15, and the codes therein used during the Nanyuan offensive on July 28. That brigade headquarters did not bring codebooks to the scene when the incident first broke out, while perhaps a careless mistake, is strong circumstantial evidence that the incident caught the Japanese completely by surprise.

Among the several theories about who fired the first shot in the Lugou Bridge Incident, the most far-fetched, the most contradictory, and the least compelling is the one that has the Japanese firing first.