

Through analysis of historical data to reappear the last moment of Zhiyuan

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Abstract: The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 was an important turning point in modern Chinese history. The defeat of the War aggravated the crisis of the Chinese nation and greatly deepened the degree of semi-colonization of China. The Battle of yellow sea was an important part of the Sino-Japanese War, in which the Beiyang fleet suffered heavy losses and completely surrendered the control of the Yellow Sea. However, in the course of the naval battle, the indomitable spirit of the officers and soldiers of the Beiyang fleet and their struggle with the enemy to the end were remembered by the world. One of the most familiar action among there struggle is the Zhiyuan under the leadership of Deng Shichang to sink the Japanese flagship “Yoshino”. How Zhiyuan acts in its final moments before its sunk has been the subject of academic attention and public discussion. With the first discovery of the shipwreck site of Zhiyuan in Dandong, Liaoning Province in 2015, the development of underwater archaeological technology, and the further in-depth archaeological work on the remains of Zhiyuan, more and more detailed information about the ship before its sunk process has been disclosed. This paper tries to reconstruct the whole process of the heroic martyrdom of the officers and men of Zhiyuan in the Battle of yellow sea through the empirical evidence of historical materials.

Keywords: Historical evidence; Zhiyuan ship; Yellow Sea naval battle

1. The main disputes about the sunk of Zhiyuan

1.1 The reason of Zhiyuan’s sunk

Since the ship Zhiyuan sank in the naval battle of the Yellow Sea, the reason for the sinking of the ship Zhiyuan has aroused the attention of the academic circles and the public discussion. Among them, the earliest record was Yao Xiguang’s “Chronicle of Oriental War”. It was claimed that the Zhiyuan was sunk by a torpedo. The Chronicle of Oriental War is a military monograph written by Yao’s own experience, his collection of official documents, telegrams, private letters and other information he had gained after the First Sino-Japanese War. The book is an important reference material for the early study of the history of the Sino-Japanese War. In the book, he wrote: “The Zhiyuan was torpedoed, the machine boiler burst, and the ship leaned left then sank instantly.” He thought the zhiyuan was sunk by the Nakshino’s torpedo. This earliest judgment about the sinking reason of zhiyuan has had a great influence on the later generations. The scene that Zhiyuan was torpedoed has even become a classic of the relevant literary works led by the classical film “Sino-Japanese”. In addition, as the educational edition of the third grade Chinese textbook unit 3 lesson 5 “Patriotic general Deng Shichang” claimed: “in the” Zhiyuan “is about to hit the enemy ship, unfortunately was hit by a torpedo, immediately the whole ship exploded on fire, soon sank.” Some primary and secondary school textbooks in the Yellow Sea battle also insist that the Zhiyuan was sunk by torpedo.

It has been the mainstream view that Zhiyuan was sunk by the Nakshino’s torpedo for a long time. But what evidence supply to Yao Xiguang’s judgment? In his work “Examination of the Reasons for the Sinking of” Zhiyuan “, Jiang Feng wrote:” Yao’s record of the sinking of “Zhiyuan” was written based on Li Hongzhang’s memorial to the throne at that time. However, there is obviously a big gap between Ding Ruchang’s battle report to Li Hongzhang after the Yellow Sea battle and the actual battle situation. He had a obvious lies in his post-war reports. In addition, Ding Ruchang was seriously wounded at that time, there was a certain distance between Dingyuan and Zhenyuan, and at that time, many ships were shot and caught fire, and smoke was everywhere. In my opinion, the possibility that Ding Ruchang truly saw with his own eyes of enemy’s torpedo hit Zhiyuan is low, so the credibility of his battle report is low. Thus, I consulted other relevant historical materials on this issue. Another opinion about the cause of the sinking of Zhiyuan is that the sinking by the Japanese’s shipboard artillery has been widely recognized in recent years. The earliest assertion of the theory comes from the 1895 edition of the Platsey Naval Yearbook, The book described: “The first guerrilla of Japanese fleet saw the” Zhiyuan “ ship marched forward, then with a group of guns in Zhiyuan, repeat-

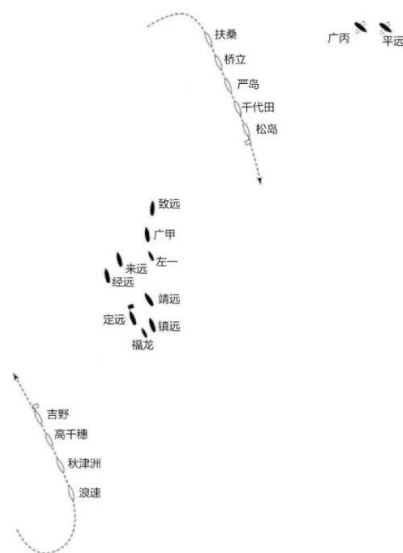
edly bombardment. Several grenades hit the Zhiyuan waterline at the same time, causing a torpedo explosion inside the sideside torpedo pipe and leaning starboard.” With the discovery of new historical materials, it was gradually recognized and accepted. One of the most representative is the disclosed Japanese naval operations report that the Japanese army did not use the torpedo in the battle in the Yellow Sea.

Earlier this year, the report, jointly compiled by the Archaeological Research Center of the State Administration of Cultural Heritage and the Liaoning Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology, was published. The report said: “ The well-preserved torpedo fuzes and some intact ammunition found near the bow of Zhiyuan indicate that there was no direct sinking by torpedoes in the torpedo capsule.”- This assertion, based on the latest archaeological findings, can fundamentally refute the idea that Zhiyuan was sunk by the hitting of torpedo.

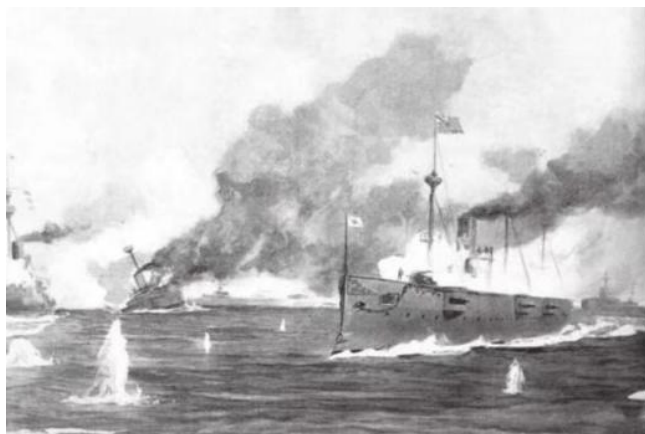
To sum up, the reason for the sinking of Zhiyuan is the fire after the gun, water, and the final sinking after the hull tilt.

1.2 Whether the impact object of the Zhiyuan was Yoshino

Similar to the sinking of the Zhiyuan, whether the impact object of the ship was Yoshino is also a major issue that has aroused academic attention and public discussion since the silence of the ship. In the general understanding, the impact object of Zhiyuan is Yoshino. The earliest source of this cognition is also Yao Xiguang’s “Chronicle of Oriental War”. In the book, he wrote: “ Zhiyuan medicine shot out, suitable for the Japanese Japanese value. Tube with Deng Shichang... that the Japanese ships rely on Yoshino, if the sinking is a ship, then our army can gather things (accomplish), then drum express, conflict to Yoshino.” Like Zhiyuan, which sank by a medium torpedo, this assertion became a mainstream view. For instance, the people’s high school history compulsory a project two second lesson” the Chinese military and civilians struggle to safeguard national sovereignty “in the zhiyuan ship hit the heroic deeds of the ship wrote:” zhiyuan in the ship after gun tilt, ammunition, tube with Deng Shichang ordered full horsepower to the ship “yoshino” hit, unfortunately was hit by shells, the ship soldiers heroic martyrs. This can see the profound influence of this judgment on the later generations. In view of this problem, another argument is that the impact of the Japanese ship for the magifen, an American employee of Zhenyuan, published in the Century Magazine in 1895. He wrote: “ The ship’s men, determined to die with the enemy and charged against one of the enemy’s biggest ships, preparing for impact.” The displacement of 4,278 tons is slightly greater than Yoshino’s 4,150 tons. Therefore, according to Majffin’s description, the Japanese ship Zhiyuan tried to hit should be Matsushima, not Yoshino. The author has consulted the relevant historical materials, and think that the following historical materials can support this point of view. First of all, in the Yellow Sea battle, the formation of the Beiyang Fleet is “split geese”, Zhiyuan is on the left wing of this burst. The Japanese joint fleet is divided into its own team and the first guerrilla, among which the flagship of the team is Matsushima and the first guerrilla flagship is Yoshino. The Beiyang fleet was attacked through repeated rotary movements. According to the 1:1 deduction of Mr.Chen Yue, President of the History of the Chinese Navy, the flagship of the team moved to the front of the Beiyang fleet at about 15:25 before the sunk.



In other words, to hit the Yoshino, Zhiyuan must turn at least greater than 150 degrees. That is almost impossible for the Zhiyuan, which has already been shot and caught fire. Secondly, the speeds of Zhiyuan, Yoshino and Matsushima are 18 knots, 23 knots and 16.5 knots respectively. Therefore, to collide Matsushima is a more realistic choice. In addition, according to the news picture titled “The sinking of the Chinese warship” Zhiyuan “ published in Illustrated London News on November 24,1894, the picture is heavily tilted and about to sink, and the flagship Matsushima with the flag of the Japanese Joint Fleet.



In conclusion, the target of the collision is the Matsushima, the flagship of the Japanese joint Fleet, rather than the flagship of the first guerrilla.

2. The revelation of the last moments before Zhiyuan’s martyrdom was restored through historical evidence

Through the above comparative study of historical data on the process of Zhiyuan ship’s martyrdom, I got the following enlightenment: First of all, when studying any historical event, we should always follow the principle of “independent evidence” and “multiple mutual evidence”, and do not have subjective preconceptions. The mainstream understanding of the two controversies in the course of Zhiyuan’s martyrdom comes from Yao Xiguang’s Chronicle of the Eastern War. Indeed, as the primary research data of the Sino-Japanese War and the Yellow Sea Battle, it has its unique advantages. But it would be a bit biased to judge from his own words. Secondly, in the study of any historical event, the selected sources should be carefully investigated to judge their authenticity. For example, Yao Xiguang’s Chronicle of the Eastern War has a high credibility as a military monograph, but after careful examination, it is found that the description of the Yellow Sea Battle in the book is based on Ding Ruchang’s battle report. However, Ding Ruchang was seriously wounded at the beginning of the Yellow Sea Battle, coupled with the prevailing smoke and the nature of the war report, so the book’s description of the Yellow Sea battle is not reliable. Finally, the spirit of daring to question should be developed in the study of any historical event. For example, the Zhiyuan ship was torpedoed and sank, and the Zhiyuan ship tried to hit the Yoshino ship and other arguments have become mainstream for a long time, and even have been written into the textbooks of primary and secondary school students. However, it is precisely because of the desire of countless historians to restore the historical truth, they carefully collate historical materials, look for illogical contradictions, and develop the spirit of questioning. Only now has a more detailed and detailed study of the process before the death of the Zhiyuan ship. As Marx said, “The development of things is a spiral,” and the truth of history may be late, but never absent.

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