

Unraveling the Truth: A Narrative Analysis of the 1992 Water Reservoir Group Assault Case

Eric Suge
yemaboy@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the unresolved 1992 water reservoir group assault case in Jiangsu, China, where a violent altercation resulted in the death of Ma Da Si. Utilizing narrative analysis, the study dissects conflicting testimonies from the primary suspect, Jo Zhan Ying, and witnesses to identify discrepancies and potential collusion. The absence of the murder weapon, coupled with unreliable witness statements and the socio-cultural context of the early 1990s, suggests a possible group assault rather than a solitary act of self-defense. By analyzing narrative inconsistencies and proposing further investigation, this paper aims to reconstruct the case's truth and advocate for justice for the deceased's family.

Introduction

On August 5, 1992, a fatal incident occurred near a water reservoir at the border of Qiao Tuan and Hong villages in Donghai County, Jiangsu, China. The confrontation involved Ma Da Si, accompanied by Li Zhan Ying, and a group of five individuals led by Jo Zhan Ying. The case remains unresolved due to the deaths of Ma Da Si and Li Zhan Ying, the absence of the murder weapon (a sickle), and reliance on potentially biased testimonies from 1992 interrogations. This paper employs narrative analysis, a method rooted in literary theory, to evaluate discrepancies in the accounts of Jo Zhan Ying and witnesses, hypothesizing that these inconsistencies reveal collusion and point to a group assault. The analysis also considers the socio-cultural context of rural China in the 1990s to assess the likelihood of collective violence and proposes reinvestigation to deliver justice.

Case Background

The incident occurred on the morning of August 5, 1992, at approximately 7:00–8:00 AM. The setting was a grassy area by a water reservoir where Jo Zhan Ying (32 years old) and four others—Jo Xin Jiang, Jo Ze Yu, Jo Mao Hua, and Ma Xiao Zeng—were grazing cattle and cutting grass. Ma Da Si (18 years old, tall, trained in martial arts) and Li Zhan Ying (shorter, referred to as the “dwarf”) approached the group, allegedly seeking Jo Zhan Ying to confront him about a stone-throwing incident the previous day. The confrontation escalated, resulting in Ma Da Si's death from a sickle wound. Jo Zhan Ying fled to Heilongjiang Province and evaded capture, while the sickle was discarded and never recovered.

Key contextual factors include:

- **Prior Conflict:** On August 4, 1992, Ma Da Si assaulted Jo Xin Jiang, causing a nosebleed, and was reportedly targeted with stones by an unknown party.
- **Ma Da Si's Reputation:** Known for physical dominance and frequent bullying, Ma Da Si had assaulted multiple individuals, including some present at the scene.
- **Socio-Cultural Context:** Rural China in the 1990s was characterized by strong community ties and a propensity for group confrontations in disputes, especially among young men.

Methodology

This study adopts a narrative analysis framework to evaluate the 1992 interrogation transcripts. Narrative analysis examines how individuals construct stories to serve their interests, revealing truth through inconsistencies and omissions (Riessman, 1993). The method is particularly suited for this case, where witnesses and the suspect may have lied to protect themselves or others. The analysis focuses on:

1. **Discrepancies in Testimonies:** Variations in accounts of the number of people present, the nature of the confrontation, and the sequence of events.
2. **Narrative Bias:** Evidence of self-interest, such as minimizing involvement or deflecting blame.
3. **Socio-Cultural Lens:** Assessing testimonies against the backdrop of 1990s rural Chinese social norms, particularly the prevalence of group violence.

The study also considers the absence of physical evidence (the sickle) and procedural irregularities noted by legal experts, such as the loss of the murder weapon and inconsistent bail amounts for witnesses (2500 yuan for one, 500 yuan for another).

Analysis of Testimonies

Discrepancies in Accounts

The testimonies reveal significant inconsistencies:

1. **Number of People Present:**
 - Jo Zhan Ying claims he was accompanied only by Jo Xin Jiang.
 - Ma Da Xue states that Jo Zhan Ying, Jo Xin Jiang, Jo Ze Yu, Jo Mao Hua, and Ma Xiao Zeng were together, totaling five.
 - Other witnesses corroborate the presence of five individuals, contradicting Jo Zhan Ying's account.
 - **Implication:** Jo Zhan Ying's minimization of the group size suggests an attempt to downplay potential collusion.
2. **Nature of the Confrontation:**
 - Jo Zhan Ying describes Ma Da Si slapping or punching his face and kicking his groin, prompting him to strike with the sickle (either directly or through a bag).
 - Witnesses offer varied accounts: some mention a punch to Jo's chest, others describe kicks or slaps.
 - Jo Xin Jiang, assaulted by Ma Da Si the previous day, denies knowing him, contradicting Ma Da Xue's claim that Ma Da Si frequently bullied the group.
 - **Implication:** The variation in descriptions of the attack and Jo Xin Jiang's denial of prior interaction suggest selective reporting to obscure group motives or involvement.
3. **Ma Da Si's Collapse:**
 - Jo Zhan Ying avoids detailing when or where Ma Da Si fell, stating only that he and Ma Da Si's companion fled.
 - One witness claims Ma Da Si ran 10–15 meters before collapsing; others omit this detail.
 - No witness reported aiding Ma Da Si or alerting authorities; his brother later transported him to a hospital.
 - **Implication:** The group's failure to assist or report the incident, combined

with vague accounts of the collapse, points to collective guilt or fear of implication.

4. **The Sickie:**

- Jo Zhan Ying claims he swung a bag containing the sickle, causing a minor arm wound, or directly struck Ma Da Si.
- The sickle, a sharp but curved tool designed for cutting grass, is unlikely to cause a fatal wound in a single strike, especially through a bag.
- The weapon's disappearance and lack of forensic analysis hinder confirmation of the injury's nature.
- **Implication:** The improbability of a single fatal strike and the missing weapon suggest multiple assailants or deliberate concealment of evidence.

Narrative Bias

Witnesses and Jo Zhan Ying exhibit clear self-interest:

- **Jo Zhan Ying:** Minimizes the group's size and his aggression, framing the act as self-defense against a single attacker. His flight to Heilongjiang and failure to surrender (despite his wife's urging) undermine claims of innocence.
- **Jo Xin Jiang:** Denies knowing Ma Da Si, despite being assaulted by him the previous day, likely to avoid implicating himself in a revenge motive.
- **Other Witnesses:** Portray themselves as passive bystanders, despite their proximity and numerical advantage, which contradicts the likelihood of non-involvement in a group confrontation.
- **Ma Da Xue:** While not present, his testimony about Ma Da Si's bullying aligns with the group's narrative, possibly reflecting community bias against the deceased.

Socio-Cultural Context

In 1990s rural China, disputes often escalated into group confrontations due to strong kinship ties and a culture of collective retribution (Fei, 1992). The presence of five individuals, some previously victimized by Ma Da Si, increases the likelihood of a coordinated response. Ma Da Si's approach with only one companion, despite his martial arts training, seems implausible unless he underestimated the group's willingness to retaliate. The group's failure to report the incident aligns with a community norm of avoiding authorities to protect local interests.

Discussion

The narrative analysis reveals a probable group assault rather than a solitary act of self-defense:

1. **Group Dynamics:** The numerical advantage (5 vs. 2) and prior victimization by Ma Da Si suggest a collective motive for retaliation, possibly triggered by the stone-throwing accusation.
2. **Unreliable Testimonies:** Discrepancies in the number of people, the confrontation's details, and the collapse timeline indicate collusion to protect the group.
3. **Missing Evidence:** The sickle's disappearance and lack of forensic data point to procedural failures or deliberate concealment, undermining Jo Zhan Ying's self-defense claim.
4. **Cultural Probability:** Group violence was more plausible than a one-on-one fatal strike, given the social context and the sickle's impracticality as a lethal weapon in a single blow.

Legal experts, including Qi , argue that procedural irregularities—such as the missing weapon and inconsistent bail amounts—warrant reinvestigation. The bail disparity (2500 yuan vs. 500 yuan) suggests authorities suspected varying degrees of involvement, yet all witnesses were treated as innocent bystanders, which defies common sense.

Recommendations

To resolve the case and deliver justice:

1. **Reinterrogation:** Surviving witnesses (Jo Zhan Ying, Jo Xin Jiang, Jo Ze Yu, Jo Mao Hua, Ma Xiao Zeng) should be reinterviewed using modern interrogation techniques to probe inconsistencies.
2. **Forensic Review:** Although the sickle is missing, medical records of Ma Da Si's injuries could clarify whether a single strike was plausible or if multiple wounds suggest group involvement.
3. **Judicial Inquiry:** Investigate procedural violations, including the loss of the murder weapon and bail disparities, to address potential corruption or negligence.
4. **Compensation and Relief:** Advocate for economic compensation and social support for Ma Da Si's parents, acknowledging the failure to deliver justice over three decades.
5. **Legal Reform:** Use the case to highlight the need for improved evidence preservation and witness accountability in rural jurisdictions.

Conclusion

The 1992 water reservoir group assault case exemplifies the challenges of resolving historical crimes with limited evidence and biased testimonies. Narrative analysis exposes inconsistencies that suggest a group assault orchestrated by Jo Zhan Ying and his companions, driven by prior conflicts and enabled by cultural norms of collective retribution. The absence of the murder weapon and procedural irregularities further obscure the truth. By reinvestigating the case with modern methods and addressing judicial failures, authorities can restore justice for Ma Da Si's family and set a precedent for resolving similar cold cases.

References

- Fei, X. (1992). *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*. University of California Press.
- Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative Analysis*. Sage Publications.