

A Brutal and Opportunistic yet Pathetic People: The Korean Question in *Shenbao*'s News Coverage on the Wanbaoshan Incident of 1931

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Abstract

This paper examines the Chinese Newspaper *Shenbao*'s coverage of the 1931 anti-Chinese riots in Colonial Korea, which happened immediately after the Wanbaoshan Incident in the same year. *Shenbao*, renowned for its influential role in late Qing and Republican media, facilitated discussions and debates over social and political issues such as reforms of various institutions, national defense and development, and Japanese Imperialist expansion among its broad readership. During the attacks on Overseas Chinese, *Shenbao* covered the event in great detail by delving into a series of episodes and reconstructing the voices of the people who had actually been on the ground and witnessed the calamity and its aftermath. In so doing, what is worth noting is that a wealth of sources was employed in its representation of the Korean perpetrators. As if letting the readers to judge for themselves what kind of people the Koreans were or solve together the so-called "Korean Question," Koreans were, as a result, described as fierce, brutal, vicious, opportunistic yet credulous and malleable people. *Shenbao*, of course, did not intend to tolerate or condone any brutality committed

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against the Chinese residents in Korea, but the Chinese affected by the riots become victims of an offense with no “offenders.” Although the rioters were Koreans, they were constructed into *legal incompetent*-like people who could not be held accountable for their actions by *Shenbao*’s multiple news articles. Hence, it is probable that such a representation of the Korean perpetrators had contributed to convincing the Chinese to refrain from taking retaliatory and violent measures against the Korean residents in Republican China throughout the 1930s.

Keywords: Wanbaoshan Incident of 1931, anti-Chinese Riots in Colonial Korea, *Shenbao*, Korean Question, Japanese Imperialism

I . Introduction: The Korean Question and a Collective Problem-Solving

On July 2, 1931, in a farming village near the Wanbao Mountain in the Changchun Prefecture, Jilin Province, Manchuria, an incident occurred where Japanese police officers fired shots in order to quell a melee that had broken out between Korean farmers attempting to dig an irrigation channel and Chinese farmers trying to stop them. Although there was no fatalities, false newspaper reports circulated in Colonial Korea, alleging that Koreans living in Manchuria were being suppressed by the Chinese government. As a result, the Koreans were incited and began attacking Chinese residents, resulting in the destruction of their homes and stores. The first attack on Overseas Chinese on July 3rd in Incheon, followed by subsequent anti-Chinese riots in Pyongyang, the most devastating of which began on July 5th,

ultimately culminating in the largest anti-Chinese riot ever witnessed in Korea.

As the most influential nationwide newspaper, particularly in Shanghai, China with a daily circulation exceeding 150,000 in the early twentieth century, *Shenbao*'s news coverage was widely read in Shanghai, a representative Chinese urban middle-class society of the time.¹⁾ Christopher Reed, in his book on Shanghai newspapers during the late Qing and Republican periods(1870-1949), indicates that *Shenbao* aimed to strike a delicate balance between profit-seeking and building a moralist reputation for itself. Especially newspapers from the late Qing period positioned themselves not only as representatives of public voices, opinions, and interests, but also, significantly implied to their readers that their engagement with the news was a powerful act capable of driving progress across all sectors of Chinese society (C. Reed 2004, 18-22, 203-56).

Shenbao's extensive coverage of the anti-Chinese riots in Korea was remarkably dynamic, revealing diverse tendencies and aspects that reflected both change and constancy over time in attitudes, voices, and, most importantly, sources of its news articles and editorials. Thus, a single word or a few words could never be sufficient to describe their overall nature. This essay, therefore, building upon existing literature on the role and nature of *Shenbao*, examines its extensive coverage of the incidents and attempts to make sense of such a wide variety in the

1) *Shenbao* 申報, one of the leading newspapers in late Qing and Republican China, played a pivotal role in late Qing and Republican print media. For instance, thanks to its intervention, legal cases initially dismissed were reexamined and taken into the legal process. Moreover, many newspapers in the late Qing and the Republican periods not only entertained their readers, but also, and more important, strived to build up good reputation as critics of political and social problems while promoting a sense of community among the people of China. For more on *Shenbao*'s role in late Qing and Republican China periods, see W. Tsai 2010.

nature of its news articles. In so doing, it explores and analyzes the contents, wording, and, if possible, symbols and narrative styles found in its coverage of the Wanbaoshan Incident and anti-Chinese riots in 1931 Colonial Korea to discern the messages conveyed to the readers or audience beyond mere depiction of the events. In this essay, I argue that Koreans under Japanese Colonial Rule were perceived as and constructed into brutal, malleable, pathetic yet opportunistic people, as *Shenbao* presented different ideas about, views on, and information about Koreans and Korea. It has been alleged and is probable that historical experiences, including but not limited to the tributary relationship, between Korea and China informed and influenced the Chinese perception of the Republic of Korea (ROK; South Korea) and vice versa today. I hope my research can also contribute to answering the question of what affects Chinese attitudes toward Korea, considering China's significance to South Korea today.

With the occurrence of the Wanbaoshan Incident and the following anti-Chinese riots in Korea, the Chinese media started to highlight Korea and Koreans in their reports. In Hankou, for instance, the development of the Wanbaoshan Incident and the following anti-Chinese riots in Korea were highlighted by extensive coverage of all the local newspapers; the number of reports on these events reached over 200 in only ten days (J. Lee 2012, 251). In his research, Lee, Jun-sik interprets the sudden increase in Chinese media coverage of Korea and Koreans, especially after the outburst of anti-Chinese insurrections on Korean peninsula, as a mirror of an upsurge of interest in Koreans among the Chinese public. That is, although some of the news articles were actually reproduction of reports published by other newspapers and news agencies,²⁾ Lee contends that such a substantial number of media reports on the incidents would have absolutely drawn

the Chinese readers' attention to these events. He also points out that none of the news reports released in Hankou called for revenge against the Koreans and instead, denounced the Japanese imperialists for having prodded the Koreans to riot against the Chinese residents in Korea (J. Lee 2012. 250-252).

In addition, Son Seunghoe indicates that many false accounts of the Wanbaoshan Incident and the anti-Chinese insurgence in Korea were frequently published in numerous Chinese newspapers of the time. Interestingly, he argues that the main cause of such a phenomenon was the reprinting of the same news articles by many Chinese newspapers without any restrictions, instead of their obsession with nationalist sentiments (Son 2007, 263).

In any case, there was a tremendous news coverage of the anti-Chinese riots in mostly Colonial Korea, which would have brought Koreans to public attention among Chinese readers. Especially *Shenbao* in particular, attempting to identify who were mainly responsible for starting the anti-Chinese riots, approached the issue of Koreans who hurt and harmed Chinese residents in Colonial Korea: The Korean Question. Hence, *Shenbao's* extensive coverage of Koreans not only revealed many of their facets, but also constructed them into multifaceted people, as we will see.

II . Koreans as Fierce and Brutal People

The ensuing anti-Chinese riots in Colonial Korea started to receive

2) For more research on the Wanbaoshan Incident and the anti-Chinese insurgence in Korea, see J. Kang 2013 and H. Lee 2009.

attention in *Shenbao* newspaper from July 5th; this time its coverage was very specific as it drew on various news reports of press agencies that were located in major cities of Japan and Colonial Korea. Since Koreans' acts of violence inflicted on Chinese were covered extensively and vividly, they appeared as fierce and brutal people. For the first two days, these news articles focused on the riots in Seoul and Incheon, providing an "objective" description of the situation based on observation of facts. Citing July 4th telegrams from Hanseong, today's Seoul, they covered these incidents in great detail:

Yesterday afternoon in Incheon, as approximately 30 Koreans who became ignited by the news on the Wanbaoshan Incident suddenly attacked the Chinatown and broke windows and immediately threw stones at any Chinese whom they encountered, the Chinese residents trembled with fear. ... Anti-Overseas Chinese riots broke out in both Hanseong and Jemulpo (today's Incheon), and that yesterday restaurants and barber shops in Jemulpo that were owned by the Overseas Chinese were attacked by approximately 100 Koreans. The number of mob who flocked there reached some thousands and mounted an offensive against the Overseas Chinese residential area. The Chinese residents armed themselves with bamboo spears and cudgels and gathered around the buildings of the Consulate (中華領事館署) and the Standing Committee (常務委員會署) and stood their ground against the mob (*Shenbao*, July 4, 1931).

In addition, another *Shenbao*'s news article reported,

Today there were a total of 55 conflicts between Overseas Chinese and Koreans. The Koreans attacked the houses of the Overseas Chinese and that the casualties reached a substantial number and the authorities

have already arrested 41 rioters and currently are strictly enforcing law to prevent crime. According to the Chinese Consulate, after the riots, already hundreds of Chinese residents have become injured (*Shenbao*, July 13, 1931).

There were even more such reports on Korean brutality. On July 6th, *Shenbao* reported specifically on the anti-Chinese riots in each area by drawing on telegrams from Tokyo, Hanseong (Seoul), Incheon, and Gaeseong (*Shenbao*, July 6, 1931). Up to this point, news coverage of the riots prioritized on “showing” than “telling,” which means it depicted what had happened on the ground without employing emotive language or adding much, if any, opinions concerning the attacks.

However, starting from the coverage on the anti-Chinese riot in Pyeongyang on July 7th, the *Shenbao* articles’ titles and contents both became heavily tinged with emotion and their tone also turned fierce. This is logical a shift in its tone considering that the riots intensified and lagged on for days, resulting in more casualties and damages on the Chinese side. For instance, in a news article titled as “People of Joseon revealing their brutality, ruthlessly decimated Overseas Chinese in Pyeongyang” states that during a riot that started at 9 in the late evening on July 5th and lasted until 4 the next morning there was an outbreak of damages in which numerous fatalities and casualties occurred and that approximately 5,000 Koreans were still attacking Chinese (*Shenbao*, July 7, 1931). On one the hand citing from telegrams from Hanseong, Pyeongyang, and Kaiyuan 開原, a city in China, *Shenbao*’s news coverage reported on the scale and progress of the anti-Chinese riot, along with subsequent damages in great detail, but on the other, since the death toll was in the process of computation, the figure varied from 29, 39, and so forth depending on the news agency. There was also a

news coverage, reporting that in Seoul (then Keijyo 京城部) an official command to refrain from going out had already been issued since late evening on July 5th and that the entrance of Seosomun 西小門, an area populated with Chinese, had been roped off and Koreans were prohibited from trespassing in order to protect the Chinese residents (*Shenbao*, July 7, 1931). These news articles would have been more than enough to make Koreans look scary, dangerous, fierce, and brutal.

Now, what is worth noting is that the news coverage proceeded to identify the “real villain” behind the riots. In fact, a telegram from Beijing was published in *Shenbao* on July 7th, explicitly accusing the Japanese of provoking both the Wanbaoshan Incident and the anti-Chinese insurrections in Korea (*Shenbao*, July 7, 1931). This, of course, would not have been intended to forgive the Korean perpetrators, let alone merely blame the entire calamity on the Japanese. Instead, it marked the beginning of *Shenbao*’s engagement with the “Korean question.” That is, instead of simply depicting what Korean rioters did in Colonial Korea, its new coverage started to discuss the place of Koreans in the world or simply their situation as colonized people without their own country.

III. Koreans as Pathetic and Malleable Pawn of the Japanese Imperialist

On July 9th, *Shenbao* published an editorial contending that Japan had incited the Wanbaoshan Incident as part of its plot to invade Chinese territories such as Manchuria and Mongolia. This editorial supports its argument by providing an analysis of Japanese domestic

politics and its pressing need to expand into Manchuria to promote both its military and economic interests (*Shenbao*, July 9, 1931). On both July 9th and 11th, there were *Shenbao* articles insinuating that the Japanese were responsible for virtually inciting the anti-Chinese insurrections in Korea by virtue of the fact that Japanese media had circulated false news about the Wanbaoshan Incident. These *Shenbao* articles reported one after another that first the Japanese news agency Dentsūsha had published misleading coverage of the Wanbaoshan Incident, and later pointed out that the false reports on the same event in Manchuria by several Japanese newspapers based in Incheon had infuriated the Koreans, eventually leading to anti-Chinese riots in Korea.

However, it is probable that *Shenbao* did not seriously consider the actual number and social class of Koreans who had at least a reading knowledge of Japanese at that time and put forth such arguments under the assumption that Japanese falsified media reports on the Wanbaoshan Incident would have directly provoked them.³⁾ Nevertheless, whether or not *Shenbao*'s claim was not without any logical fallacies, at this point *Shenbao* appears to have been more inclined to condemning the Japanese media for instigating the riots, rather than denouncing the Korean rioters who actually inflicted harm on the Chinese residents.

3) Lee, Hyun-jeong argues that the *Shenbao*'s claim was convincing enough because not only did the Japanese media release false reports on the Wanbaoshan Incident as was also verified by the Lytton Report—an official report written by the Lytton Commission dispatched to China by the League of Nations to examine the incident at first hand—but also, and more importantly, the Korean newspaper *Chosŏn Daily* was deeply influenced by the Japanese media reports. However, whether or not *Shenbao*'s claim was persuasive is beyond the scope of my essay; instead, what I find convincing is that *Shenbao* could more likely be seen as blaming the Japanese, especially their false news reports, rather than the Korean rioters at this point.

Shenbao continued to criticize the Japanese, this time, by targeting their authorities, the Japanese police based in Korea. In its editorial released on July 12th, *Shenbao* reproached the Japanese police for not having taken active measures against the Korean rioters as an effort to stop their violent acts toward the Chinese residents.

For several days after the Koreans broke out in a massive riot, we don't hear that the government generals took any action to quell the riot. They only dispatched the police after the Chinese had caused serious trouble and the Korean agitation had subsided. This means that the government general, if they didn't deliberately manipulate and incite the riot, at least neglected their duties and failed to control the situation. How could the government general escape responsibility for failing to manage the situation properly? (*Shenbao*, July 12, 1931)

Here, if we examine the content of its editorial in detail, we find that *Shenbao* was even regarding Japanese police force's failure to suppress the anti-Chinese riots with skepticism. That is, instead of seeing it as a mere sign of their incompetence or misfortune, *Shenbao* suspected that they had purposely not suppressed the insurrections almost as if they had been "encouraging" the Koreans rioters to carry on their violent acts.

Shenbao furthermore denounced the Japanese by problematizing its government's attitude for responding to the anti-Chinese riots in Korea. Expectedly, Japanese government not only defended its position by claiming to have made every effort to the fullest extent to put down the anti-Chinese insurrections in Korea, but also even attributed the cause of the riots to the Chinese; according to Japan's version, it was the Wanbaoshan Incident that provoked the Koreans to resort to violent acts against the Chinese residents, but since the Chinese authorities had

caused this event, consequently it was the Chinese who were to blame for the anti-Chinese riots in Korea.

Eventually, as would be very likely to have become hotly indignant upon hearing the Japanese government's claim, *Shenbao* published on both July 8th and 12th editorials rebutting its statement and requesting for Japan's responsible behavior in the aftermath of the tragic incidents. Its editorial released on July 8th argued that, as the oppressed people themselves, the Chinese could not have done anything to cause the Wanbaoshan Incident and thus it was absurd to blame the Chinese for having provoked the Koreans to riot. Thus, it concluded by contending that, instead of attributing the cause of the anti-Chinese insurgence to the Chinese in Manchuria, the Japanese government should rather take responsibility for its suspicious failure in quelling the riots (*Shenbao*, July 8, 1931). On July 12th, *Shenbao* reiterated that Japan was responsible for all the harm inflicted on the Chinese residents in Korea because the Korean peninsula had long become a part of their imperial domain by then (*Shenbao*, July 12, 1931). Moreover, as it shed light on the issue of Chinese laborers through the telegram, it criticized that "on the one hand the Japanese had recently tempted the Koreans in Colonial Korea to embrace anti-Chinese sentiment, but on the other, restricted the immigration of the Chinese laborers to the Korean peninsula with the Government General decree," and then petitioned for dispatching the Bohai Fleet (渤海艦隊) to Incheon (*Shenbao*, July 8, 1931).

In these news articles, there was no room for Koreans' agency or subjectivity. By condemning the Japanese mostly, on the surface level, Korean rioters might seem to have been exonerated for their atrocious deeds. A closer look, however, reveals that they were relegated to a mere puppet-like figure controlled by the string master, the Japanese, sitting behind the curtain. Thus, Koreans were constructed into helpless

and malleable people who would play the pawn and do the biddings of the Japanese by *Shenbao*'s news articles.

In any case, we must not forget that *Shenbao* had the slightest intention to condone any of the brutality committed by the Korean perpetrators. Thus, it had no reason to conceal condemnation against them: for instance, the Preparatory Meeting and the Federation of Shanghai-Shandong Commerce (旅滬山東商界聯合會籌備會) strongly condemned the Koreans, writing them off “as the remnants of a ruined country” who were ignorant of the public law (公法) and failed to observe human duties” while ”condemning the Japanese imperialist for having resorted to “the most flagrant measure, that is, cajoling them into causing this crisis (*Shenbao*, July 10, 1931).”

Thus, it appears that the Koreans were depicted as people who could not act alone on their own free volition without any intervention from outside: the Japanese Colonial Government. Interestingly, as we will see, Koreans' relationship with the Japanese imperialist became what the Chinese considered as a common ground with them.

IV. Koreans as People in the Same Boat with the Chinese

As if defending the Korean perpetrators, more reports blaming the Japanese for causing misunderstanding and animosity against the overseas Chinese were released in *Shenbao*. Although there was criticism on Korean brutality, as we will see, the news reports started to advise its readers not only to see the real offender hiding behind the Korean rioters' back, but also, to be aware that they were also in the same boat: victims of Japanese imperialist expansion and aggression.

Especially *Shenbao* was alluding to Japanese conspiracy of pitting the Koreans against the Chinese so that it could deflect the Chinese's attention from its expansion into Manchuria.

In fact, unlike the denunciation from the private sector, each party apparatus of the Guomindang placed emphasis on embracing the notion of solidarity among the people of a small and weak power of the third world. The Third District Party Apparatus (三區黨部), claiming that the Japanese newspapers had fabricated reports on the Wanbaoshan Incident and had cajoled the Koreans to kill the Overseas Chinese, warned not to be deceived by the Japanese imperialist and called for unity (*Shenbao*, July 8, 1931). The Sixth District Party Apparatus (六區黨部) pointed out that Koreans' reckless Sinophobia was completely caused by Japanese conspiracy and that it was by no means their real intention:

We not only do not expect to see the true spirit of racial self-determination being destroyed by the anesthetic of imperialism, but at the same time, nor do we want to hear that the Koreans who are slaves under the horseshoes policy (鐵蹄政策) continue to do the bidding of the ambitious empire as its aggressive means (*Shenbao*, July 8, 1931).

Overall, it was about raising the specter of Japanese imperialist invasion of the Northeastern region. As the anti-Chinese riots came to the fore, *Shenbao* was likely to have been concerned that the Chinese public's attention was diverted from the most fundamental issue: the Japanese imperialism. Thus, although it continued to fuse raw criticism of Koreans into its news coverage of the riots, its main subject of denunciation was the Japanese. As if a moderator, *Shenbao* directed the

readers' attention to Japanese imperialist expansion so that the public opinion reached a consensus centered on the so-called Japanese conspiracy theory claiming that Japan had been behind all the trouble. For instance, in a telegram sent to the central authorities of the Nanjing Nationalist Government (南京國民政府 中央黨部) by a representative of the Shanghai Municipal Chamber of Commerce, instead of denouncing the Koreans like the previous media coverage, this time there was an emphasis on the fact that although the Japanese police force had declared to suppress the mob, they did not arm themselves and rather sneakily "condoned" them (*Shenbao*, July 11, 1931).

In the July 11th news report, the Japanese conspiracy theory was reiterated; it suspected that although the Japanese authorities had usually cracked down on every Korean rally, that this time they permitted their public assembly at night on July 4th to protest against the Chinese oppression in Manchuria was a sign that the Japanese, although already aware that the enraged Koreans would cause trouble, deliberately looked on with folded arms (*Shenbao*, July 11, 1931). In addition, another news coverage on July 21st reported that a Korean named Kim, Cheongbang 金清芳 and a Japanese, Yamamoto, Kintaro 山本金太郎, were arrested as the masterminds of the Korean laborers' assault on Overseas Chinese in Niigata Prefecture on 16th (*Shenbao*, July 21, 1931).

The Chinese perception about Koreans during the riots could also be seen in a letter of plea sent to the Nationalist government by Liu Zhonglu 劉中陸 and Cao Jingyu 曹景玉, the representatives of the Association of the Overseas Chinese Merchants of Incheon (仁川中華商會). According to this document, the Japanese intervention and Koreans were to blame for the tragic incidents:

Japan is plotting to prod the Koreans into driving out our [compatriots, the] Overseas Chinese. However, Koreans did not bother to verify any of the facts, nor did they care about common interests (公利); instead, they simply took snippets of news at their face value and revealed their cruel true color (*Shenbao*, July 9, 1931).

Eventually, it concluded that the anti-Chinese riots were “another tragedy of denouncing the Overseas Chinese as their enemies just like before in 1927 (*Shenbao*, July 9, 1931).” Overall, *Shenbao*’s news reports described the Korean offenders as reckless and ruthless people who were helplessly fooled by the Japanese to blame the Chinese for their hardship and “avenge” them. However, *Shenbao* cautioned its Chinese readers not to be pitted against the Koreans, for it would mean falling for the Japanese imperialist’s plot.

Furthermore, *Shenbao* even allowed the Korean representative figures’ voices to be heard just like defendants being offered a formal opportunity to address the court to explain personal circumstances that might be considered in sentencing. Besides, it would have definitely been in the best interest of the Korean associations based in China to accuse the Japanese imperialism as the offender and call for solidarity between Chinese and Koreans. Both the Provisional Government of Korea in Shanghai (上海臨時政府) and the Korean National Association in the United States (在美韓人國民會) argued together that the anti-Chinese riots were caused by Japanese conspiracy and that Koreans had never intended to do so (*Shenbao*, July 21, 1931). Another Korean association in China called the Korean People’s Alliance (韓族同盟會) also issued a statement on July 10th, which was later published in *Shenbao* on July 20th. Starting by discussing the long-history of friendly relations between the China and Korea at the beginning, this

statement continued by likening the two countries to brothers who helped each other and also shared the ups and downs together as if they were lips and teeth. Then it moved on to contend that the rioters (villains, 凶徒) were a gang of Japanese imperialist's cat's-paw (collaborators, 走狗) and that China and Korea should cooperate even more to overthrow the Japanese imperialism and liberate the downtrodden people (*Shenbao*, July 20, 1931).

Claiming to represent the 600,000 Koreans living in China (在中韓僑), the Overseas Korean Committee in Jilin for Research on the Wanbaoshan Incident (吉林韓僑萬寶山事件討究委員會) also issued a declaration targeting the Chinese as its main audience; as expected, it also attributed the cause of the anti-Chinese riots to the Japanese premeditated incitement. However, as it reported on the death of Kim Isam, interestingly, it argued that he was murdered by the Japanese. According to the declaration, as a foreign correspondent in Changchun of a Korean newspaper (朝鮮謀新聞), he was later reprimanded by the Koreans in his home country for having given a false report on the Wanbaoshan Incident which triggered the anti-Chinese riots. Shortly thereafter he returned to Jilin and was conveying his apology to Chinese of all walks of life and also contributed to Overseas Chinese newspapers to inform that he had fallen a victim to another's scheme. Finally, according to this committee's version, when the Japanese became aware of his act of apostasy, at noon on July 15th, they sent Park, Changha, a Korean policeman of the Consulate, and several other Koreans to the Yuandong Inn where he was staying at that time and fired seven or eight bullets at him (*Shenbao*, July 22, 1931). Here, it is probable that this association's purpose of blaming the Japanese for his death was to emphasize the fact that Koreans had been manipulated to play the pawns of the imperialists.

V. Koreans as Untrustworthy and Opportunistic People

Shenbao, however, remained dedicated to giving equal amount of attention to various voices. Whether the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party were interested in reconciling Chinese and Koreans and promoting solidarity among the people of small and weak powers, *Shenbao*'s editorials were under no obligation to stay aligned with their positions. As a result, soon diverse, or more precisely negative, perceptions of Koreans were revealed, especially columns serving as a window into how subjective, if not misleading and occasionally even baseless, the Chinese intellectuals' perspectives on Korea had been then. As the editor in chief for *Shenbao*, Chen Binhe 陳彬龢 published under the pen name "Bin 彬" on July 9th the column "Advice for Japanese and Koreans and Recommendation for Our People on the case of Wanbaoshan Incident (爲萬寶山案忠告日人韓人并島國人)." According to his account, along with criticizing the anti-Chinese riots as the result of Japanese conspiracy of incitement to riot, he made four suggestions to Koreans: the first one was provided interrogatively, asking Koreans how could they dare to resort to violence instead of respectfully requesting when they came to cultivate someone else's land after losing their own due to the fall of their nation; in the second one, once again he interrogatively reproached the Koreans, throwing question on why they were oppressing the Chinese peasants on Chinese soil while they themselves were downtrodden ones; the third suggestion was to preach the Korean audience to become aware that while Koreans and Chinese fought against each other, the Japanese became the only ones who benefited in the middle; finally, he warned Koreans not to forget that they were charged with a great mission of the epoch as

oppressed people, instead of degenerating into murderous weapons (*Shenbao*, July 9, 1931).

In “An Essay on Visit to Korea (游韓漫談)” written under the pen name “Jiping 寄萍”, which was published serially in ten installments from July 10th onward in *Shenbao*, Chinese intellectuals’ ambivalent attitudes toward Koreans were revealed. Yang Manhua 楊縵華, the author, who was also a calligrapher (書法家), visited Colonial Korea one month before the Wanbaoshan Incident and subsequent anti-Chinese riots. In her essay, Yang introduced herself as a secretary for the Chinese delegation to the Exposition of 1930 in Liège, Belgium. On their long journey back to China, they stopped by Japan and Korea, respectively. In her essay, she reminisced the time when she had visited the Chinese Consulate General in Korea and claimed that it was twice as large as the Chinese legation in Tokyo. Then, she sighed for the old days as she added that it was a symbol of China’s large presence in Korea when Yuan Shikai was based on the Korean peninsula as Imperial Resident of Seoul. She also lamented that after the Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese authorities in Korea became stripped of all the privileges and by then even the Chinese Consul was deteriorating due to funding shortage, whereas during the Yuan Shikai Administration, there were Chinese consular police, military training ground, and moreover, extraterritoriality for the Chinese. She further claimed that the Koreans had chanted the eulogies of his charitable deeds (*Shenbao*, July 10, 1931).

Yang Manhua categorized Koreans’ perception of China into four types. First type consisted of old Koreans over the age of fifty who remembered the Qing suppression of Imo Mutiny in 1882 and thus would thank China and appreciate its contribution; they would eventually hope China to soon become prosperous and powerful enough

to help people of small and weak power. Second one was composed of ambitious young men (有志青年) who could no longer tolerate imperialist oppression and thus came to China to participate in the revolution; they were determined never to live together with the Japanese under the same sun and thus prayed for the success of Chinese revolution. Third group consists of minority of educated youth in Colonial Korea who bore the scars of their country's ruination, but would spend the rest of their lives acquiescing to the reality. Here, Yang predicates that even when these three parties were put together, they would still remain as a minority. That being so, the last party becomes the overwhelming majority composed of those who Yang classifies as the Korean younger generation who degenerated into slaves for the Japanese. Yang describes them as those who became anesthetized by the education for enslavement and thus do not even know what kind of race (minzu 民族) they are or about Korean history, that is, almost became assimilated into Japanese people; she concludes that the Koreans of this category were incorrigible, the true culprits behind the riots, and pathetic slaves of a ruined country (亡國奴)(*Shenbao*, July 11, 1931). Be that as it may, she finishes by contending that the Koreans stayed passive during this tragic massacre of Chinese residents in Korea and that they must not be considered as the Chinese counterpart for negotiation, nor should the Chinese ever forgive the Japanese imperialists for their premeditated conspiracy (*Shenbao*, July 20, 1931).

Here, according to Yang's editorial, although the Japanese imperialists were explicitly identified as the main culprit, Korea was also introduced as China's former vassal state (屬邦) and that since majority of the Koreans by then were pro-Japanese and obtuse slaves of a ruined country, Korea could neither be seen as the counterpart of

Chinese diplomacy nor be worthy to be associated with. Especially Yang not only glorified the period in which Yuan Shikai was based in Korea as the Imperial Resident of Seoul, but also even stated that the Koreans had endorsed it.

VI. Koreans as Offenders

In one of its articles published on July 20th, *Shenbao* again reveals its fury against Japan's plot, but more importantly, the brutalities committed by the Koreans are also vividly portrayed. According to the report, there also were Overseas Chinese residents in Korea who had arrived by train in Jinan 濟南 on July 15th and that they had been attended by the Association of Relief Work (Zhenwuhui 賑務會). The returning Overseas Chinese were reportedly all taken to the Henan native-place association (Henan Huiguan 河南會館) and thus those who had arrived in Jinan were Chinese originally from Henan. One of the Overseas Chinese who fled from Pyeongyang, Korea, had stated:

This massacre of the Chinese residents by the Koreans was instigated by the Japanese who had set a five-day term beforehand approving them to slaughter arbitrarily. The Koreans (the people of Joseon, 朝鮮人) were wielding axes and came blowing whistles and pounding on drums in droves; one of them had a 9.94 feet-long bamboo spear which was sharpened like a real spear, another one was holding a cudgel in his hand, and another individual was carrying a stone. There also was one who had a big wagon following behind him; it was loaded with rocks that he used as weapons. ... Even after the crisis broke out, the Japanese, although had declared to protect our compatriots, were still supporting

the Koreans behind the scenes; since the Japanese had announced to provide protection, our fellow countrypeople remained relieved, hoping nothing unforeseen would happen, but, unexpectedly, became entangled with their scheme. ... The Japanese resorted to a cunning trickery by falsely claiming to the Overseas Chinese that that they had nothing to do with the Koreans' riots, although they themselves were actually responsible for the destruction of the Chinese residents' buildings (*Shenbao*, July 20, 1931).

An earlier *Shenbao* article on July 12, 1931, by carrying the reports of the British and American news agencies, strongly implies that the Koreans, antipathetic toward the Chinese, were directly involved in violently attacking the Chinese residents: "Furthermore, since most of the assistants for the Japanese police were Koreans, there are evident signs of their support for the riots (*Shenbao*, July 20, 1931)."

However, *Shenbao* articles written by a special correspondent who had been sent to Andong 安東, reported on the anti-Chinese riots in Korea. As a Chinese frontier town located on the opposite shore of another major Korean town, Sinuiju 新義州, by then there were many Chinese refugees who had fled from Korea to escape the violent actions of the Korean rioters. Its article released on July 13th claimed that the economic conflicts between the Korean and Chinese laborers in Korea had provided the cause for the anti-Chinese insurgence.

Since the Chinese laborers crossed the border and stayed in Colonial Korea, working diligently at lower wages, they were usually resented bitterly by their unemployed Korean counterparts who were afraid of losing their livelihood. ...They have long conspired to ostracize and deport them, but did not have a pretext to do so and thus their plot lagged on to this day. As soon as the news of the Wanbaoshan Incident

spread, these unscrupulous thugs made a pretext of it to incite and mislead all the other Koreans to riot (*Shenbao*, July 13, 1931).

This article also introduced tragic cases of successful Overseas Chinese in Korea who had been sacrificed during the anti-Chinese insurrections.

A Chinese merchant from Shanghai whose surname was Wu 吳 wished to establish a branch in Seoncheon 宣川 and brought 50,000 silver tael worth of dry goods to Seoul (then Gyeongseong 京城), but lost all his cargo due to the riots and later hanged himself out of despair for his dire situation. A barber from Hubei carried Guo 郭, as his last name lived with his family near Namdaemun in Seoul, but eight of them, himself included, were all murdered by the mob of rioters (*Shenbao*, July 13, 1931).

Here, even as this news report mobilized various analogies and adjectives to describe vividly the brutality of pillage in Sinuiju, it displayed an evident sign of refraining from falsifying facts on the Japanese and explicitly identified the Koreans as the offenders.

Koreans from all parts of Korea swarmed like bees and flocked in like clouds and abused our compatriots, committing massacre of unprecedented magnitude. ...The crossroads between Andong and Japanese concession area are guarded by both the Chinese and Japanese sides to restrict the access of Koreans to prevent conflicts (*Shenbao*, July 13, 1931).

The above excerpt of a *Shenbao* report on July 13 written by the special correspondent to Andong claimed that not only the Chinese, but

also the Japanese authorities were trying to prevent the situation from worsening.

VII. Koreans as Vicious yet Credulous People in an Offense without “Offenders”

Shenbao's article on July 22 covering the long story of Chinese delegates' visit to Pyeongyang and their encounters with people, more or less, serves a conclusion for or answer to the Korean Question. As usual, *Shenbao* allowed all voices to be heard, thereby leaving it up to the readers to decide, judge, and conclude what kind of people Koreans were then.

On July 22nd, *Shenbao* cited a report on the situation of the riots in Pyeongyang documented by the representatives—who actually came to Pyeongyang to not only convey their condolence, but also to investigate the local situation on the ground—of three organizations: the Chinese Consulate General in Joseon (中國駐朝鮮總領事館), the Nationalist Party's Immediate Branch Office in Joseon (國民黨駐朝鮮直屬支部), and the Association of Chinese Merchants (中華商會) (*Shenbao*, July 22, 1931).

According to this report published on July 22nd, the delegation departed from Seoul late in the evening on July 8th on train and arrived at the Pyeongyang train station the next morning. Unlike their original plan to present directly to the Overseas Chinese refuge, they were taken to the Pyeongyang Hotel (平壤飯店) in the name of reception by the police officers of the Japanese Provincial Office, Korean group, and a party of newspaper reporters. Although the Japanese, at first, tried to

prevent the delegates from making a visit under the pretext of maintaining public safety, as the representatives strongly insisted to do so they had no choice but to give them permission.

First, a Korean reporter's voice was sounded off. The news continued: While the delegates were at the Pyeongyang Hotel waiting for Japanese authorization, a Korean reporter of *Dong-a Ilbo* (東亞日報, *Donga Daily*) approached them and claimed that “the current disgraceful incident was by no means the intention of the Koreans, and furthermore, they were also not the acts of the Koreans in Pyeongyang. I have seen for myself, but those who committed the crimes (兇行) were all people from unknown countries and that they were people, hired at some other places, who would come and perpetrate such acts professionally.” However, as soon as a Japanese functionary came to them, the newsman perplexedly said good-bye and went away (*Shenbao*, July 22, 1931).

Then, this time a voice of a Chinese representative figure gets sounded off. Interestingly, just like the Korean news reporter, he also defended the Korean perpetrators; the only difference is that he did so more directly and even went further to condemn the Japanese. According to the news report, at that time, approximately 5,200 Overseas Chinese were staying in the medical school (醫學講習所) building. There the delegation met Meng Xianshi 孟憲詩, the president of the Association of the Chinese Merchants in Pyeongyang (平壤中華商會). Meng claimed that this calamity was a premeditated massacre in the sense that although there were such numerous incidents of assault during the last two days of incessant rioting, the Japanese police did not bother to intervene even a bit; it was only after all the Overseas Chinese had been murdered was the martial law proclaimed. He eventually argued that it was not the Koreans of a ruined country to blame, but

rather the Japanese state. (*Shenbao*, July 22, 1931).

Of course, just as *Shenbao* was not willing to publicly condone any of the brutality committed by the Korean rioters, so did the delegates in the news report. Even though they listened to Meng Xianshi's opinion without rebutting, they could not deny what they had seen with their own eyes. Later, the delegates visited the Pyeongyang Hospital to express their condolence to the Overseas Chinese casualties and shortly thereafter jumped on a vehicle to move to the cemetery where the Chinese sacrificed during the riots were buried. On their way, they witnessed the brutality of the riots; Overseas Chinese peasants' vegetable plots were completely looted and even the straw-thatched cottages were incinerated (*Shenbao*, July 22, 1931).

Finally, the article relayed the remarks of a Japanese police officer who condemned the Koreans for their brutality against the Chinese while praising the local Japanese government for "generously" putting the dead victims in the ground. The news continued: When the delegates arrived at the burial ground, scores of Japanese police had mobilized Korean workers to bury the corpses. The Japanese police claimed: "The Korean rioters were very vicious. Those beaten up to death, poor soul! Thank god the Japanese local government office (官署) would find a spot to bury them like this and even have someone to build tombs for them." As they mourned over the death of the victims, one of the delegates exclaimed "During the Boxer Uprising Chinese killed 10,000 Japanese and thus the Eight-Nation Alliance was formed and inflicted a huge catastrophe on our country. Today although such a substantial number of Chinese have lost their lives, not a single country would cry for them on behalf of us; how unfair this is!" (*Shenbao*, July 22, 1931) As a result, for the Chinese, they became victims of an offense without "offenders," since no actions, either legal prosecution

or personal retaliation, could be or were taken against those responsible for the massacre and damage.

VIII. Conclusion: The Significance of *Shenbao*'s Representation of Koreans

The Colonial Korea and Koreans did not receive much attention from Chinese media. Even when there were news reports on Koreans in China, their contents were often very negative, if not pejorative. Especially there were reports that denounced the Koreans' independence movements as noting more than Communist insurrections, disturbing public order and security in Manchuria. One even went so far as to portray the anti-Japanese struggles of Korean residents in Manchuria as a threat to Sino-Japanese relations (J. Lee 2012, 249-250). Below are some of these examples:

Koreans who came to Harbin are all so poor that the clothes that they put on are shabby beyond description (*Shenbao*, April 17, 1928);

Yesterday night around two in the morning, in the village of Longjing 龍井, Jiandao 間島, the branch office of the Oriental Development Company (東洋拓殖株式會社) was attacked by some anti-Japanese Koreans. ...The mob subsequently destroyed two railroad bridges and cut off a wire, turning the Longjing Village into darkness in no time. ... Fortunately, the Chinese and Japanese military police immediately arrived and settled them. But the rioters avoided the suppression and all escaped into the mountains. The local residents are seized with deadly apprehension (*Shenbao*, June 2, 1930);

A gang of scores of Korean robbers attacked Liudaogou 六道溝 which

is located approximately seven kilometers (eighteen *lis*里) southwest of Yanji延吉 The gang of Korean robbers is allegedly collaborating with the Chinese Communist Party (*Shenbao*, June 4, 1930.);

After the annexation with Japan, even if you were Koreans in the past, today you are technically Japanese. Since Japan is a civilized nation of the world, you all have become people of a civilized country. As long as you live within the border of our country, China, you are to behave as people of a civilized nation and enhance the national prestige of Japan. Furthermore, since China and Japan have maintained intimate relations, any of your acts that pose threat to the public security in China could hurt the relationship between the two countries, China and Japan, as well as that between their people (*Shenbao*, October 2, 1930).

However, with the occurrence of the Wanbaoshan Incident and the subsequent anti-Chinese riots in Korea, Chinese media began to focus more on Korea and Koreans in their reports, as evident in the news coverage by *Shenbao* in particular, as seen above.

It would, therefore, seem logical to question what makes *Shenbao* special. Thus, wrapping up, this section discusses the characteristics of the Chinese newspaper *Shenbao* to demonstrate its reliability and relevance as a sample for this research. *Shenbao* first emerged in the treaty port of Shanghai in 1871 as a highly commercialized newspaper. It was not long before it achieved success in the early 1930s, with a daily circulation of more than 150,000. It is noteworthy that Chinese print media during the Republican period often had to maintain amicable relations with their political patrons for survival. Since the survival and growth of Chinese print media depended on the support of diverse political patrons, it can be assumed that each newspaper or magazine directly mirrored the political position of its patron. Any print media that severed ties with their patrons were immediately subject to

disadvantageous consequences (S. R. MacKinnon 1997, 5-11).

As one of the Chinese print media during the Republican period, *Shenbao* certainly faced challenges posed by its affiliations, primarily aligning itself with the Guomindang (GMD) at the beginning of its publication. However, as its business flourished in the early twentieth century, *Shenbao* underwent a significant shift in its political stance. Despite its close connection to the GMD until then, it suddenly began to express critical perspectives on Jiang Jieshi's (蔣介石; Chiang Kai-shek) tepid response to Japan's aggression in China. As expected, *Shenbao* soon faced retaliation, allegedly from the GMD; its owner, Shi Liangcai, was murdered in 1934. Nevertheless, this newspaper continued to diverge from the GMD line (S. R. MacKinnon 1997, 5-11).

In fact, even before the assassination of Shi, *Shenbao* had already begun to express its own political position, differing from that of the GMD, especially evident since its coverage of the Wanbaoshan Incident of 1931. *Shenbao* overtly presented diverse ideas and opinions in its news reports and editorials on the Wanbaoshan Incident and the subsequent anti-Chinese riots in Korea, making it difficult to pinpoint its overall political stance, as if it lacked one entirely. As discussed above, while some articles explicitly accused the Japanese imperialists as the main culprits behind the tragic events, others denounced the Koreans as their accomplices and offenders rather than merely regarding them as puppets of the Japanese.

Moreover, *Shenbao*'s reporting on these events displayed noticeable dynamism, showcasing both change and constancy over time. As seen above, *Shenbao* not only switched its news sources and corrected its early yet false reports on the Wanbaoshan Incident, but also maintained critical perspectives on the Koreans while seemingly attributing blame

to Japan for the harm inflicted on the Chinese during the traumatic events. Consequently, the absence of a significant upsurge in anti-Korean sentiment or retaliatory riots against the Koreans becomes ironic in light of *Shenbao*'s extensive coverage of these events in the Chinese media, where the Chinese were victimized.

투 고 일: 2024년 01월 10일

심사완료일: 2024년 02월 07일

게재확정일: 2024년 02월 08일

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요약

잔인하고 기회주의적이면서도 한심한 민족:

1931년 萬寶山 事件에 대한 申報의 보도에서 본 조선인 문제

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이 논문은 같은 해 만보산 사건 직후 발생한 1931년 식민지 조선의 반중 폭동에 대한 중국 신문 신보의 보도를 살펴봅니다. 청말과 공화당 언론에서 영향력 있는 역할을 한 것으로 유명한 신보는 광범위한 독자층 사이에서 각종 제도 개혁, 국방과 개발, 일본 제국주의 팽창 등 사회적, 정치적 이슈에 대한 토론과 논쟁을 촉진했습니다. 화교 공격 당시 신보는 일련의 에피소드를 파헤치고 실제로 현장에 있었던 사람들의 목소리를 재구성하여 재난과 그 여파를 목격한 사람들의 목소리를 재구성하여 사건을 매우 상세하게 다루었습니다. 이 과정에서 주목할 만한 점은 한국 가해자들을 표현하는 데 다양한 출처를 활용했다는 점입니다. 마치 독자들에게 한국인이 어떤 사람들인지 스스로 판단하게 하거나 이른바 '한국인 문제'를 함께 풀어나가자는 듯, 결과적으로 한국인은 사납고 잔인하며 악랄하고 기회주의적이면서도 신념이 강하고 유연한 사람들로 묘사되었습니다. 물론 신보는 재한 중국인에 대한 잔혹 행위를 용인하거나 묵인할 의도는 없었지만, 폭동으로 피해를 입은 중국인들은 "가해자는 없고 피해자만 있는 사건의 피해자"가 되었습니다. 폭동 주동자들은 한국인임에도 불구하고 신보의 여러 기사를 통해 자신의 행동에 책임을 질 수 없는 법적 무능력자(금치산자)처럼 구성

되었습니다. 따라서 이러한 한국인 가해자 표상은 1930년대 내내 중국인들이 중화민국 내 한국인에 대한 보복과 폭력적 조치를 자제하도록 설득하는 데 기여했을 것으로 추정됩니다.

주제어: 1931년 만보산 사건 (萬寶山事件), 식민지 조선의 반중 폭동, 신보 (申報), 조선인 문제, 일본 제국주의

