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The Terror of the Crowd: The Riot as a Form of Street Politics in Colonial Korea 1920-29

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Abstract | This study examines the "Korean crowd riots" that occurred in 1920s colonial Korea. By viewing these riots as a result of the collective experience generated through the March First Movement, this paper progresses beyond generalized colonialist and modernist discourses to specifically analyze the internal dynamics of the riots that occurred during the period. Colonial authorities and Japanese settlers in Korea during the early 1920s perceived a clear change in Korean society following the March First Movement. More specifically, clashes with colonial authorities or Japanese settlers in daily life now tended to provoke a collective riotous response—a kind of "crowd politics." To analyze the crowd riots, this study employs two concepts: the "politics of the event" and the "politics of numbers." It argues that as spontaneous events, Korean crowd riots constituted political behavior and demonstrated the potential social power underlying the institutional/semi-institutional spaces of politics in 1920s colonial Korea.

Keywords | colonial crowd, colonial mass politics, politics of the event, the March First Movement, Japanese settlers in Korea

Introduction

"Crowd riots" arose in colonial Korea in the 1920s. Some of these riots supported the growth of the national public sphere, turning events that arose spontaneously in "the street" into opportunities to politically challenge colonial forces. This study considers such events a consequence of the collective experience that resulted from the March First Movement.

Spanning the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria, the March First Movement incorporated fifteen major cities and seven provinces, and resulted in 7,509 dead and 46,908 imprisoned. As the most prominent and significant political rebellion that occurred during the Japanese occupation of Korea, we might ask what effect it had on Korean society. The consequences are not too difficult to

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discern with respect to intellectual movements and ideological change. However, considering that the March First Movement was the first nationwide popular resistance movement in colonial Korea, and by no means limited to a few organizations or intellectuals, it is important to understand how the collective experience of the general population—those who could not voice themselves through texts—was expanded and transformed through its influence.

The "street crowd riots" of the 1920s provide an important case study in this regard, allowing one to trace how the March First Movement served as a turning point in the everyday psychology of the colonial Korean public. While the relationship between the March First Movement and these unorganized and spontaneous crowd riots was reflected in the commonplace cries of "*manse*" (long live [Korean independence], *banzai* in Japanese), it can be most clearly seen in the testimony of Japanese settlers and police authorities. Their collective notion of a "post-1919 transformation in Korean popular sentiment" is representative of how colonial settlers and authorities perceived the populist reverberations of the March First Movement during the 1920s.

Why did these riots occur so frequently (as many as thirty are confirmed in media reports) in the 1920s? And how might one explain the transcendental sublimation that instantaneously condensed disparate crowds into a single body through a single "feeling" (a spontaneous emotive response rather than a rational or logical judgment)? To conceptualize the composition and movement of these "crowds" is no easy matter, as the passage of the riots did not completely comply or follow a well-defined point of leadership. The activities that constituted the crowds lacked clear direction and the people within moved automatically, as if components of a singular machine. In explaining the 1920s street riots that erupted upon the aftermath of the March First Movement, it is therefore crucial to establish a conceptual framework for describing the behavioral dynamics of the crowd while fully considering the distinct characteristics of the crowd or the public and distinguishing them from other more permanent entities such as an organization or association.

With this stipulation in mind, this study examines the crowd riots of 1920s colonial Korea, a relatively underexplored historical subject, and establishes a framework for explaining the dynamics of these riots as a form of political conduct.[1]

1. Using a different methodology, Ryu Si-hyŏn (2009) investigates the March First Movement with respect to the *minjung* (masses).

"Since 1919" and the Perceptions of Colonial Settlers and Authorities

At ten o'clock on the morning of October 10, 1920, an assembly was held in the public hall of the Keijō (colonial period Seoul) Chamber of Commerce (Keijō Shōgyō Kaigijo) under the banner of "The Meeting of Japanese Businessmen and Community Leaders in Korea" (Zensen Naichijin Jitsugyōka Yūshi Konwakai; hereafter "Meeting"). Taking place over three days (October 10-12), the Meeting consisted of more than 160 people, including 119 Japanese community leaders (representatives of each territory in Korea) and other colonial authorities (Zensen 1920, 1-2). Attendees included Japanese members of the provincial councils (*to p'yŏngŭihoe*), municipal councils (*pu hyŏbŭihoe*), the Keijō Chamber of Commerce, and other such local governmental organizations. The President of the Bank of Korea (Chōsen Ginkō) Minobe Shunkichi and Chairman of the Keijō Chamber of Commerce Kugimoto Tōjirō presided over the Meeting. Governor-General Saitō Makoto and Chief of the Government-General Department of Police Administration Maruyama Tsurukichi joined the Meeting on the second day to listen and respond to the community leaders' opinions, which suggests the importance of this assembly for the Japanese community in Korea (Zensen 1920, 1-2). What problems (that warranted the involvement of the Governor-General and other Government-General associates) did the attendees discuss?

1. The Terrorized Japanese Settler Community in Korea

As stated in the Meeting: "Recently, a situation has arisen across the land in which Korean ideas are changing dramatically.... Therefore it is necessary to ascertain and devise a response to the situation in each province" (Zensen 1920, 1-2). Participants at the Meeting uniformly criticized the optimistic official position of the colonial authorities that Korean ideas had improved "since 1919" (the year of the March First Movement). They described the circumstances in their respective territories and demanded countermeasures. Given this demand, we might ask what kind of post-1919 Korean characteristics had the conference participants observed in their daily lives, and what it was about this behavior that they perceived as problematic.

(1) Koreans Are No Longer Submissive!

The first change the Japanese community leaders perceived in Korean public sentiment since the March First Movement had to do with "submissiveness." In

short: “They no longer meekly do as they are told!” (Zensen 1920, 62). In the eyes of the Japanese community leaders, Koreans had become haughty and proud. And as the following excerpts of statements from the Meeting demonstrate, this attitude encouraged a great increase in the number of altercations with Japanese settlers.

> The social disruption caused by people chanting *manse* has drastically increased. They even swing their arms when walking through the streets. If they see a Japanese, they will bump shoulders with him to start a fight.... In this sort of environment, those with insufficient financial power return to the homeland. This is a situation in which it is impossible to live safely. (Hwangju representative Komosaka Shūichi in Zensen 1920, 5)

> When Japanese women come to the community reservoir to draw water, Koreans cut in line.... It used to be that Koreans would make way for a Japanese person no matter their place in line, but now they cut in front of Japanese people waiting for their turns. If the [Japanese] women complain, they are shoved aside. I think this is a case that clearly conveys the degree to which ideas have degenerated. (Samchŏnp'o representative Takahashi Takeo in Zensen 1920, 72)

> Arriving at a bathhouse, one Korean said to the policeman's wife, “Today you bathe but in two or three days you'll be dead for sure, so wash yourself nice and clean!” (Anju representative Yoshida Yutaka in Zensen 1920, 13)

The problem the Japanese perceived was a certain unassailable spirit pervading the changed attitude of the Koreans. As for where this so-called spirit originated, the Japanese considered it a problem directly linked to the number of Koreans present at any given incident.

(2) The Reactions Come from Crowds in the Hundreds

> Lately the Koreans have tended to cluster in crowds, and there have been many recent instances in which a mere difference of opinion with a Japanese resident has instantly resulted in the formation of a crowd of a hundred or more. Under such circumstances, in which it is difficult to predict when they might form a group to persecute [us], [Japanese] people are increasingly afraid. (Masan representative Matsubara Sakizō in Zensen 1920, 18)

As the above passage conveys, situations in which large groups formed almost instantaneously in response to conflicts with Japanese settlers and police became more frequent after 1919. The Japanese thus faced a situation dictated by the logic and effect of crowd numbers, as expressed in the comments of Kwangju representative Shikano Shūzō:

> There was a certain Mr. Saitō where I live in Changhŭng-gun, South Chŏlla Province. He was a little over sixty and had lived there for more than ten years. He happened to be a member of the committee for preventing the spread of infectious diseases and was active in preventing the spread of cholera. One day, a Korean came and asked him for some disinfectant. As Mr. Saitō poured the disinfectant into a watering can, some of the liquid unfortunately got on the Korean's shirt. Enraged, the Korean grabbed the watering can from Mr. Saitō's hand and beat him with it, and there was a great fight. (Kwangju representative Shikano Shūzō in Zensen 1920, 34)

In describing this episode, Shikano emphasized that "there was more than one Korean" participating in the fight.

> A number of Korean onlookers gathered together shouting. Thirty, no, fifty crowded forwards, striking the elderly man…. It was for this reason that Mr. Saitō sold his land and returned to [Japan] three days ago. [He] abandoned the land he had managed for more than ten years and left…. As a result, both sides were judged as being at fault in the conflict. Is this truly appropriate? Furthermore, it wasn't just one Korean who struck [Mr. Saitō, but] the authorities designated both sides as at fault in the matter without distinguishing between right and wrong, appearing to disregard the [role of] onlookers. What can we make of such a judgment with respect to the governance of Korea? (Shikano in Zensen 1920, 34-35)

Shikano's description of the behavior of the Korean onlookers reveals the logic of numbers, or numerical superiority, which functioned as an important variable after 1919 in challenging the strict hierarchical distinction between colonizer and colonized in Korean colonial society. This point is reinforced in the following passage:

> Every year there is a joint Japan-Korea athletic summit, of which I am an organizing committee member. This year, however, for one reason or another we were unable to raise the national flag at the athletic summit. Even though we desired to do so, as *a minority versus a majority* and with everything hinging on emotion, we worried that [the Koreans] might cause a riot. Regretfully, then, we held the athletic summit without raising the [Japanese] flag. Moreover, while last year's athletic meeting was a joint Japanese-Korean affair, this year involved only Koreans with Japanese students unable to participate. (Anju representative Yoshida Yutaka in Zensen 1920, 13 [emphasis added])

As articulated above, the primary reason why the problem of numbers aroused such fear among the attendees at the Meeting was that a concentration of numbers could arise rapidly, unpredictably, and uncontrollably at any moment. In other words, a riot is a type of event that is conditioned by the spontaneity and

irregularity caused by its own dynamic. For the attendees, this uncontrollability guaranteed constant anxiety over when such an event might arise. The attendees at the Meeting had clearly began to experience this kind of collective psychological state after the March First Movement. By revealing how they had come to live in fear of sheer Korean numbers of people present in any given context since 1919, the attendees argued that the colonial authorities failed to grasp the transformation of Korean society caused by the March First Movement. For this reason, they suggested what they considered to be appropriate countermeasures.

(3) A Numerical Response to a Force of Greater Numbers: The Plan for the Transfer of More Colonizers

At the Meeting, Japanese community leaders made the following three general demands of the colonial authorities: one, an increase in police power to help maintain order; two, the pursuit of a thorough Japanese immigration policy; and three, the construction of railroads and other forms of economic infrastructure (Zensen 1920, 11-12). While each of these requests was guided by a distinct rationale and objective, they all related to the purpose of increasing the number of Japanese settlers in Korea. In other words, creating a more focused immigration policy, the improvement of public order through an increase in police, and the development of infrastructure through the construction of railroads, were all proposals designed to encourage more colonizers.

> The greater the number of Japanese in Korea—whether three, five, or ten million—the better. I think the transplantation of a great many to Korea, allowing the Japanese to possess Korea practically and proficiently, is the most necessary measure. As someone already mentioned, only fifty thousand or so have put down roots over the last ten years, and it is questionable whether such a meager number might eventually practically possess Korea [to the degree] that the Japanese might prosper. (Suwŏn representative Yuasa Iei in Zensen 1920, 38)

As the statement above reflects, the Japanese colonizers on the ground considered that the practical rule of Korea would be impossible without a further increase of settlers. This approach to solving the situation derived from the perceived numerical nature of the crisis. Despite their status the Japanese settlers thought of themselves as a threatened "minority" with respect to the colonized. From their perspective, since 1919 a change had occurred whereby Koreans, previously considered as innocuous and servile, could at any moment suddenly gather to threaten them. This experience of the colonizers indirectly attests to a new phenomenon that emerged in Korean society during the 1920s, that of political action conducted through the energy of the "crowd." Unlike an organization this

social body operated without a clearly defined purpose or idea. This rendered it far more unpredictable and therefore dangerous.

2. The Epistemology of the Colonial Authorities

This situation in which the power of the Korean "majority" threatened the stability of colonial society was by no means absent prior to the March First Movement (see "5-paengmyŏng ŭi kunjung" 1918; "Yŏgin han chŏnch'a" 1916). In this regard, the violent uprising of more than a thousand Koreans that began outside the general store of Keijō Primary School on August 28, 1918 is a representative case. This riot is notable not only for its similarity to the various Korean street riots of the 1920s discussed below, but also its resemblance to the Japanese Rice Riots of 1918 ("Keijō ni kome bōdō" 1918; "Miyōmmaeso ŭi p'oktong" 1918).

Nonetheless, these earlier riots were different from those of the 1920s not only in terms of their lesser frequency but also their emotional content. That is to say, they were not spurred by the collective emotive transformation that Koreans underwent in the wake of the nationwide March First Movement. As the testimonies of the Japanese settlers demonstrate, the March First Movement caused a distinct fissure in the Korean perception of the Japanese, one that seditiously grew into a nationwide popular mood.

Given this shift, what was the epistemological frame through which the colonial authorities viewed this transformation relative to their notion of the general behavioral conduct or "feeling" of Korean society? The comments of the chief of the Government-General Department of the Police at the Meeting, alongside the *The Crowds of Korea* (*Chōsen no gunshū*), a book commissioned in 1926 by the Government-General Secretariat Archive (Chōsen Sōtokufu Kanbō Bunshoka), both provide insight on this matter (Chōsen Sōtokufu 1926).

On the afternoon of the second day of the Meeting, the Chief of the Government-General Department of Police Administration Maruyama attended with Governor-General Saitō. He admitted that the anxiety of the attendees regarding the psychological change in Korea since 1919 was justified and asked for patience, asserting that the authorities were taking the situation seriously, and without false passivity or optimism. Furthermore, he asserted that the primary cause for the "Koreans becoming extraordinarily arrogant [and generating] an environment of resistance" was the emotional aftermath of the March First Movement, which was "propagating… the energy and power [of the Movement] nationwide." For Maruyama, this seditious Korean attitude was further encouraged by the global ideological shift toward progressive social change that had followed World War I. "The power of the police," he added,

might "appear to have been greatly weakened, but this is not in fact the case. The so-called power of the people has become unprecedented… even in the homeland. One can say that even Koreans cannot escape global ideological trends, and thus democracy has covertly entered Korea" (Chōsen Sōtokufu 1926, 61). In sum, Maruyama argued that it was now natural for anyone to advocate for the "legitimate rights of the individual," and that the dissent in Korea only reflected a wider global concern with ideas of the "individual," "nation," and "self-awareness." Given this global "democratic" current, Maruyama asserted that Japanese settlers had to accept a new reality in which "it was no longer possible to expect Koreans to meekly follow orders" (62).

Ultimately, the Meeting concluded with an informal resolution to persuade the Japanese community in Korea to endorse the Government-General's policy of conciliation. The fact that conciliation was now the dominant governing principle of the 1920s, revealed the uniformly shared perception among colonists that an uncontrollable change had occurred in Korean society following the March First Movement. More precisely, it reflected the idea that irrespective of the change of atmosphere favoring autonomy over independence within the Korean intellectual community, a separate, emotive form of "crowd politics" based on informally "gathering together and resorting to force" was taking root among the Korean masses.

In terms of policing this ad hoc collective political activity, in the mid-1920s the Government-General began to differentiate between groups maintaining a relatively fixed nature over a long period of time following [their own] regulations and groups without a fixed nature or regulations. The Government-General defined this latter kind of group as a crowd (*gunshū*) and sought to analyze the particular characteristics of Korean crowds. *The Crowds of Korea* (Chōsen Sōtokufu Kanbō Bunshoka 1926), published in 1926 and written by Murayama Chijun, a part-time employee of the Government-General Secretariat Archive, is representative of this effort. This work is important as it reveals that the colonial government had come to recognize the significance of "unorganized and spontaneous political actions," despite the fact that these riotous actions might not have been previously considered as being as dangerous as the organized collective movements with clear long-term objectives.[2]

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2. Upon graduating from Tokyo Imperial University in July 1919, where he majored in sociology, Murayama Chijun came to Korea to work for the Government-General as an inspector of the "Korean social situation." In October 1919, he worked for both the Department of Investigations (Chosakwa/Chōsaka) and Department of Editing (P'yŏnjipkwa/Henshūka) of the Government-General Central Office (Chungch'uwŏn/Chūsūin). He then moved on to become a teacher of the Kyŏngsŏng (Keijō) Private Buddhist Central School (Kyŏngsŏng Sarip Pulgyo Chungang Hakkyo).

In the introduction to his book Murayama states the following: "Regarding the crowd, until recently such mass gatherings were of a disorderly and temporary nature. They were thus inconspicuous, and one tended to ignore them as impulsive, disorderly rabbles." However, he continued in a more serious register: "While they are disorderly, because their sense of culpability is reduced to the degree which their mass configuration is simple and disorderly, it is not uncommon for them to engage in unexpected and daring behavior. Lacking the quality of permanence, they are freed from having to worry about the repercussions of such actions…. Events [involving crowd disturbances] thus tend to transpire at unpredictable moments." Murayama therefore asserted the need to acknowledge the power of the crowd, and the fact that a crowd of Koreans was a threat in and of itself (Chōsen Sōtokufu 1926, 103).

Based on this understanding, Murayama divided the Korean "crowd" into the following general categories: "tenancy farming dispute crowds" appearing on farms; "strike crowds appearing in the factories"; "united school-closure crowds appearing in the schools"; "class-struggle crowds appearing for the liberation of certain social classes"; and "mobs appearing for the resolution of other incidents." This last broad category, consisting of "spontaneous mobs," corresponded to what Japanese colonists considered as the typical type of politically dangerous crowd. While Murayama regarded this kind of spontaneous mob as significant, he determined that its dynamic force was grounded in irrationality and chaos. In this respect, his understanding of the politically charged crowds that had troubled Japanese settlers differed little from the dominant framework advanced by colonial authorities.

> Ultimately, crowds consisting of hundreds suddenly emerge, but the cause is curious people. Crowds are a product of the hyperbole of Koreans, a people that quickly desire to see, discuss, and exaggerate the matter at hand…. They begin with curiosity and expand further, fueled by resolve to see and know…. When there is a criminal element among the crowd, they deny it, blurring the truth of the event. A crowd that focuses only on what it wants to know believes whatever it says to be the truth without deliberation or discernment. Above all, one must beware of the tendency for the crowd to transform into a threat through such gossip. (Chōsen Sōtokufu 1926, 213)

After his contract ended in March 1922, he took on successive jobs as a teacher of Western history at a public commercial school and a teacher at the Severance Professional School of Medicine (Sebŭransŭ Ŭihak Chŏnmun Hakkyo). In May 1931, he became a teacher at the Kyŏngsŏng (Keijō) Professional School of Law (Kyŏngsŏng Pŏphak Chŏnmun Hakkyo). His professional manner was closer to that of a policy consultant or researcher than an ordinary bureaucrat, as reflected in his writing style.

Such was the Government-General's perception of Korean crowds. On the one hand, it recognized the notion that the spontaneous behavior of unorganized masses (in potential "rise" or revolution) was now considered as representative of a new political "power" within urban industrial society. On the other, it framed this behavior as abnormal. This understanding reflected the influential notion of mass psychology that had begun in Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century and spread to Japan in 1913, assuming the mantle of "crowd theory" (*gunshūron*). This idea we explore next.

A Methodological Problem for Analyzing Crowd Politics

Mass psychology, or crowd psychology, was a theoretical interest which came to prominence in Europe in the 1880s and 1890s through the work of Gustave Le Bon, Jean Martin Charcot, Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, and Marie François Xavier Bichat. During this period it sought to characterize the activities of large bodies of people relative to psychological notions of mass hysteria and irrationality. Suggestibility, hypnosis, and contagion served as the keywords for Le Bon's mass psychology, referring to the pathological state that overtook an otherwise normal human being upon experiencing the abnormal condition known as the "crowd" (Jonsson 2015). As Le Bon stated: "The individual in a crowd loses sense of his self; he is a machine disconnected from his will. Indeed, [to] participate in an organized crowd is to descend the civilizational ladder by several rungs" (Le Bon 2005, 34).

Arguably the perceptions of psychologists such as Le Bon reflected a binary epistemological framework juxtaposing the rational individual with the irrational, emotional crowd (masses, majority). Here, the normality of the individual is contrasted with the abnormality of the many. Inherent to this understanding of the many as an abnormal social body was a modernist conceptualization of subjectivity, which endeavored to frame the subject in terms of individuality, devoid or transcendent of social relations. In fact, the randomness of the "affect" on an individual embedded in infinite networks of relationships invoked a certain notion of terror relative to the modernist conception of subjectivity. Furthermore, it presented an important philosophical condition to the psychologists of this era, one which enabled them to define the many (i.e. the crowd or the mass) as a pathological other distinct from the individual.

Japan's acceptance of this modern pathological theory of the crowd followed the translation of Le Bon's work into Japanese in 1912. The Taishō era, which commenced with the death of the Meiji emperor, was characterized by a number

of chaotic events, including World War I, the dispatch of troops to Siberia, the Rice Riots, the Great Kantō Earthquake, the Toranomon Incident, the second movement to protect the constitution, and so forth. These traumas deeply informed the social context of the period, and encouraged Japanese intellectuals to deploy the theory of the "pathological crowd" to explain the "politics of the many" that often arose therein (Higuchi 1913, 1-3).

Higuchi Hideo was representative of the authors who introduced the European theory of mass psychology to Japan during the Taishō era. His book, *Crowd Theory* (*Gunshūron*), is premised on the distinction between the "crowd" (*gunshū*) and the "people" (*minshū*) or "general public" (*koshū*). The terms "people" or "general public," he argued, were restricted to connoting the class character of the masses. The term "crowd" was thus necessary to specifically emphasize the patterns of irrational behavior that manifest through such masses. The "crowd," he writes, "pertains to a certain psychological state different from that of the normal individual, not necessarily to the gathering of individuals itself." Higuchi Hideo therefore considered that such a "distinct psychological character" could be understood in terms of psychological pathology, following the ideas of European mass psychology in vogue at the time (Higuchi 2013, 28).[3]

This idea of the crowd as a pathological condition born of collectivity was in fact another manifestation of the cogito-centric modernist epistemology of eighteenth-to-nineteenth-century Europe, which asserted "the subject's power [and] freedom from the external world of objects" (Gandhi 2000, 52). Within this conception the collective entity known as the crowd is designated in terms of numbers, yet it is always able to transcend the finitude of numbers through an expansion of relationships. In the sense that such expansion is potentially immeasurable, the crowd thus belongs to the category of "nature," or that which lies outside the scope of human planning and control. Accordingly, to bring order to this untrammeled natural phenomena, the subject (individual) must exist externally to it, maintaining a subject-object relationship with it. In Le Bon's words, to remove this distance is to "descend the civilizational ladder by several rungs" (Gandhi 2000, 52).

The limits of this modernist theoretical approach illustrate the need for a

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3. Korean intellectuals also applied Japanese crowd theory to explain the so-called "change in popular Korean sentiment since 1919." Ch'oe Hwa-suk (1927) is representative in this regard. Yi Kwang-su's (1922, 11-12) explanation of the March First Movement also faithfully reflected the epistemological framework of crowd theory, portraying the crowd as barbarian or beastly: "The change in our psyche occurred fearfully [and] rapidly since March 1, the year before last. And this change will continue endlessly into the future. However, this is both a natural and incidental change."

more sophisticated conceptual framework to analyze the political behavior of the crowd, one which is not bogged down in a dichotomous othering between the individual and the mass. Arguably, to achieve a useful understanding of the Korean crowd riots this theoretical task is as important as the gathering of empirical evidence. Following this imperative, we will freshly conceptualize the politics of the crowd using two ideas: (a) the "politics of the event" and (b) the "politics of numbers." Here, the politics of the event explains the compositional rationale behind the political behavior of the crowds that spontaneously gathered in urban public space, or "the street." The politics of numbers, on the other hand, explains whether the crowds that formed in this manner produced a kind of political effect, and the reasons for this effect. According to (a) the *politics of the event*, the riots at this time took form in the space known as the (a-1) *street*, generated by a non-rational (illogical) expression known as (a-2) *emotion*, and unfolded according to a law of self-composition known as *the law of spontaneity*, which, while contrasting to the "logic of organization," does not necessarily result in chaos or disorder. (b) As a crowd that developed in this manner expanded into a "number beyond numbers," two primary *political effects* were produced: *terror* and *violence*. After elucidating this methodological framework, the remaining task will be to substantiate the "riots" that spontaneously erupted on the streets in colonial Korea after the March First Movement and continued into the 1920s.

Crowd Riots on the Streets of Korea

1. Politics of the Event

The crowd riots that occurred on the streets of Korea in the 1920s mainly started with clashes between Koreans and Japanese colonists or the police. The pejorative words and actions of Japanese settlers to Koreans and the resulting social conflicts were severe and regular enough that the colonial authorities considered this issue the greatest challenge to stable governance. Cases presented within *(Regarding Korean Compatriots) A Record of Japanese Introspection* (*[Chōsen dōhō ni taisuru] Naichijin hansei shiroku*), published in 1934 by the Government-General of the Korean Military Police Headquarters, illustrates the kind of incidents that incited these confrontations. The volume contains many cases of abusive and racist language causing insult and humiliation. For example, there is the case of a barber who, upon finding out he has unknowingly cut the hair of a Korean who spoke Japanese fluently, exclaims, "You dirty bastard!" Lamenting

the waste of his freshly cleaned barber tools, he continues, "Normally, Koreans speak Japanese with an accent. You're really arrogant!" Also, there is the case of a Korean who arrives to take his seat at a movie theater only to be told, "Koreans smell bad!" He is denied a seat and kicked out of the theater.[4]

Japanese mistreatment of Koreans did not always elevate their sense of outrage toward collective riotous phenomena of resistance that might transcend such individual experience. Therefore, we might ask, what were the conditions through which these discrete individualized contexts of conflict were transformed into a nationally significant series of political and social events, driven by impromptu mass revolt?

(1) The Street

Between 1920 and 1929, the conflicts between Koreans and Japanese or the police that escalated into bona fide crowd riots share a common spatial location: major streets (or the plazas and markets situated therein) lined with buildings and facilitating large flows of people and diverse modes of transportation. It is due to this circumstance that most of the crowd riots occurred in cities.

In the case of Seoul, the Korean residential area of Chŏngno functioned as the focal point for many turbulent incidents. The Chŏngno area contained the following prominent streets: Chŏngno 2-chŏngmok (chōme), An'guk-dong 4-chŏngmok, Hwangt'ohyŏn 4-chŏngmok (currently Kwanghwamun Junction), Hwanggŭmjŏng 4-chŏngmok (home to Keijō City Hall and linking to what is now Ŭlchiro), and Namdaemun-t'ong (dōri) 4-chŏngmok. Connecting Pagoda Park, the Umigwan, and Tansŏngsa, these were the roads most frequently featured in newspaper headlines when riots arose. Below, the precise role such thoroughfares played in the composition of "events," as defined above, will be investigated through several case studies.

First, there were the so-called "cholera riots" which took place over three successive days, from March 16-18, 1920. During this period, cholera produced 28,075 cases (11,084 dead) in 1919 and 37,797 cases (13,568 dead) in 1920, shaking colonial Korean society to its foundations. One crucial problem was that the coerciveness and violence of the authorities' preventative measures

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4. *A Record of Japanese Introspection* was issued to each province by the Government-General of Korean Military Police Headquarters to substantiate the existence of a so-called "harmony between Japan and Korea." The book was planned as an "anthology of sincere and friendly Korean conduct" collecting examples of Koreans' so-called "good conduct and beautiful expressions" and corresponding Japanese examples. However, when a vast number of instances of Japanese insults and violence toward Koreans were reported from each territory, the book was turned into a "record of introspection" (Chōsen Kenpeitai Shireibu 1934, 3-4).

dramatically provoked Korean anger, perhaps more so than the cholera itself. The colonial hygiene police managed the disease by isolating heavily infected areas (cutting off traffic) and quarantining and forcibly moving patients and carriers to places such as the Sunhwa Hospital (Sunhwawŏn). Such measures dealt with Korean patients and carriers as if they were criminals, completely disregarding their social situation prior to infection. Furthermore, it was rumored that to enter the Sunhwa Hospital, a facility under the jurisdiction of the colonial government specializing in the treatment of infectious disease, was essentially a death sentence. The situation was so severe that some historians today (Paek Sŏn-rye 2011; Yu Sŏn-yŏng 2016) have claimed that the March First Movement was a backlash against the oppressive anti-cholera measures of the colonial authorities. What can be said for sure is that public resentment to the situation was only intensified through the March First Movement, as is evident in case (1), the riot of August 10-11, 1920.

Case (1), a riot on August 10-11, 1920, was triggered by a conflict between Ch'oe Yŏng-t'aek (47) and several police officers. Ch'oe, who lived in Inŭi-dong 2-pŏnji, arrived at the nearby Tongdaemun Police Station to report the death of his wife. When an examination revealed he was a cholera carrier, however, he was brought from the police station to a nearby police box on Chŏngno 4-chŏngmok, where a stretcher awaited to transport him to the Sunhwawŏn. Refusing to lie on the stretcher, Ch'oe insisted that he was in fine shape and requested that the police let him walk. An altercation between Ch'oe and the police ensued ("Sibyuk-il pam" 1920).

The crucial detail here is that this altercation occurred on Chŏngno 4-chŏngmok, located at the heart of the Korean residential quarter in Seoul. As news of the altercation spread via passersby, a reported seven hundred Koreans gathered at the Chŏngno police box. Uniform in indignation and displaying "excited expressions and an infuriated tone," the crowd shouted things like, "Die before you get on the stretcher!" and "What do you care about another dead Korean?!" ("Sibyuk-il pam" 1920).

Taken aback by the sudden materialization of this angry crowd, the police officers retreated, suggesting a rickshaw instead. This did little to calm the crowd, which soon grew to more than a thousand. Upon hearing shouts of "If you go, you die!" "Beat to death the police officers who intend to throw an innocent and healthy man into a pit of death!" and "Destroy the police box!" the frightened policemen decided to send Ch'oe home and call for reinforcements from the Tongdaemun police station. Further enraged by this action, the crowd cried out, "Beat these bastards to death!" and began to throw stones at the police officers. The situation escalated as a stone struck an officer in the head and

another broke the police box window. This situation showed slight signs of abating as reinforcements arrived to arrest a few of the rock-throwers and disperse the crowd. However, "the impassioned and excited crowd were not subdued at all. By evening the intersection was so densely packed that we didn't know if we could get through" ("Sibyuk-il pam" 1920).

The riot did not conclude with the resolution of the altercation between Ch'oe Yŏng-t'aek and the police but became an incident in and of itself. This course of events was greatly influenced by the fact that it occurred in the Chŏngno 4-chŏngmok area. During the colonial period, Chŏngno was a hub for Koreans living in Pukch'ŏn.[5] The area was a site for many political, economic, and cultural activities as well as being a residential center. It was also home to several modern public civic spaces, including Chŏngno 2-chŏngmok's Pagoda Park, and theaters like the Umigwan (founded in 1912), the Yŏnhŭngsa (1907), the Changansa (1908), and the Tansŏngsa (1907). Furthermore, Chongno directly connected to Hwangt'ohyŏn, Korea's first modern public plaza (now Kwanghwamun Plaza). Chŏngno's spatial character thus facilitated the rapid spread of anger in relation to this incident, drawing upon the general injustice the police exercised in preventing the spread of cholera, calling forth Korean crowds through the almost instantaneous spread of "word of mouth" around the area. Furthermore, this large and busy interconnected public space enabled a catalytic connection to be made between the initial event that occurred between Ch'oe Yŏng-t'aek and the police, and subsequent riotous behavior of a largely unrelated mass of people.

This situation escalated on the second day, when the police confronted Ch'oe Yŏng-t'aek once again. This time, the police paid a visit to Ch'oe's house on Chŏngno 2-chŏngmok and tied a rope to his neck, intending to escort him on foot to the Sunhwawŏn (in Sŏdaemun). Their choice of "walking" as a means of transportation was a decisive trigger this time around. Walking from Chongno 2-chŏngmok to Kwanghwamun Junction, Ch'oe loudly shouted about his "unjust situation" and appealed to Koreans passing by. Many were moved by his plight and began to follow behind. Initially the crowd grew slowly, but by the time they reached Kwanghwamun Plaza it was around three or four hundred strong. At this point Ch'oe gave an impromptu speech: "My hands are bound, yet I have committed no crime. I am fifty-four years old this year. About five or six days ago, my wife died from an ailment she had suffered for years. They said she died

5. Pukch'ŏn was the social hub for Korean elites of the colonial period. In this area were clustered the residences of Korean community leaders and Korean schools such as the Keijō First Normal High School (Kyŏnsŏng Cheil Kobo), Central Normal High School for Girls (Kyŏngsŏng Yŏ Bogo), and the Posŏng Technical School (Posŏng Chŏnmun).

from cholera and disinfected the whole house. They then said I had cholera, which I denied, and they bound me like this. Everyone, please know the truth!" As his speech concluded, the crowd began to shout: "They intend to toss a healthy man into the pit of death against his will!" and, "Beat the police to death first!" The situation in Kwanghwamun Plaza had thus snowballed into a denunciatory rally targeting the police. By this point it was six p.m., and the situation intensified as people browsing at a nearby night market[6] and enjoying after-dinner exercise filtered into the plaza, and the crowd grew into the thousands ("Hwangt'ohyŏn sagŏri" 1920).

This numerical transformation did not signify a mere quantitative expansion; the character of the crowd qualitatively changed. When a certain number was reached which was able to engender a situational change, this number functioned as a critical point which precipitated the qualitative transformation of the event.

Faced with a crowd that had rapidly grown into the thousands in Kwanghwamun Plaza, the status of the police regressed from that of a dominant authority to a subjugated "minority." As the police abandoned Ch'oe Yŏng-t'aek and fled, the crowd threw rocks, shouting, "Those bastards are escaping!" and "Grab those bastards!" At this point, the crowd in Kwanghwamun Plaza had reached perhaps five or six thousand people ("Kunjung muryŏ samch'ŏn" 1920).

Kwanghwamun Junction and Plaza, which served to connect major roads such as Chŏngno and T'aep'yŏng-t'ong, directly facilitated the crowd growing to the critical numerical point that transformed the situation into an attack on the police. The connective nature of the space of Kwanghwamun therefore made possible events previously unprecedented, by enabling initial contact between the myriad passersby. The large dimensions of the plaza therefore additionally facilitated the initial event's transformation into a political situation of a much greater magnitude by allowing so many people to rapidly join together.

After driving off the police that had attempted to detain Ch'oe, the crowd encountered another Korean forcibly brought through the plaza on a stretcher. The crowd beat the police and attended to the woman bound up in the stretcher. Further enraged, "some threw stones at the police and others chanted *manse*." The crowd's use of the word "*manse*"—which had become a subversive political slogan during the March First Movement—demonstrates that its character, realized through actions performed on the street, had already ascended to a

6. The night market was established on June 21, 1916. It was primarily located on a street in Chongno running in front of the Posin'gak (Posin Pavilion) to Pagoda Park. Opened for the "prosperity of the streets" and "harmonious cooperation between Japanese and Koreans," the market was a nightly spectacle (Yu In-hyŏk 2015, 222).

greater political valence.

At the same time as the crowd in Kwanghwamun Plaza violently attacked the police, it was also moving south down T'aep'yŏng-t'ong toward Severance Hospital to confirm if the accused actually had cholera. Severance Hospital was located next to Namdaemun Market and across from Namdaemun (South Gate). It lay at the intersection between T'aep'yong-t'ong, which stretched from Kwanghwamun Plaza to Namdaemun, and Namdaemun-t'ong, which connected Chŏngno. By the time the crowd arrived at Severance Hospital it filled the entire street from Kwanghwamun to Namdaemun, and was showing signs of erupting into a massive riot. The situation was diffused only after numerous mounted police were dispatched from nearby Ponjŏng (Honmachi) Police Station (now Chung-gu Police Station), as well as Chŏngno Police Station and Tongdaemun Police Station ("Kunjung muryŏ samch'ŏn" 1920).

The example above demonstrates the political effect of the space known as "the street." Here we can see how the uncommonly large open dimensions and interconnected nature of the area around Kwanghwamun made possible the following: (a) an "amplification of numbers," which precipitated (b) a "qualitative situational change," and then (c) the "meeting of different series (in the Deleuzian sense)." This circumstance was to turn what started as a cholera riot (i.e., a discrete event that had separately occurred at numerous times and separate locations previously across colonial Korean urban space) into an unprecedented collective uprising of immense scale.

Case (2) began at around eight o'clock in the evening on April 26, 1921 at Hwanggŭmjŏng Junction. As a crowd of about four or five hundred returned from flower viewing at Changch'undan, they came across a Japanese man beating a Korean who had intervened to prevent the rape of his daughter. The crowd attacked, and a Japanese policeman then arrived to defend the colonist. If this event had occurred somewhere other than Hwanggŭmjŏng 4-chŏngmok, it might have remained an isolated violent incident. Yet Hwanggŭmjŏng (now Ŭlchiro) straddled the Korean residential quarter in Pukch'ŏn and the Japanese residential quarter in Namch'on running parallel to Namdaemun-t'ong. It therefore served as a frequent focal point for incidents between Koreans and Japanese. The particular space and location of this road therefore facilitated an encounter between those journeying to enjoy flower viewing at Changch'undan[7] (a representative pastime of colonial urban culture) and a Japanese colonist enacting violence against a Korean. The contact between these two series (a great mass of

7. The Changch'undan was created as a park in 1919 with the planting of cherry-blossom trees. It was one of the most popular places in Seoul to see the spring flowers in the 1920s.

Koreans, and a smaller number of Japanese committing an unjust action) in this space immediately escalated the episode into a political event—a Korean crowd riot. In this new situation, the crowd screamed "smash it!" and threw stones at a tram carrying away the police officer and the attacker he had helped ("Hwanggŭmjŏng ŭi taesoyo" 1921).

Case (3), which occurred on April 22, 1925, was similar in character to case (2). Once again the particular character of the local urban area (or "the street") facilitated an encounter and enjoining between two distinct social groups. This time, the riot began with the dispersal of a mass rally. The police had expended a great deal of effort in breaking up this crowd which numbered in the thousands, a typical scale for political protests at the time. However, many of these scattered protesters soon encountered the large number of shoppers at the nearby Chŏngno night market. Here the joining of a representative space of protest with a representative leisure space of 1920s colonial urban culture facilitated an anomalous social encounter between the wide range of individuals within. An initial crowd of a hundred-or-so labor activists from the rally, met onlookers in front of the Umigwan on Chŏngno 2-chŏngmok, Tansŏngsa on Chŏngno 4-chŏngmok, and in Pagoda Park. The activists themselves were from various political organizations. However, when this series encountered the thousands of ostensibly non-political, discrete visitors to the night market, both the activists and shoppers began to shout out support for the workers' protest with cries of "Workers, *manse*!" This moment of contact between these different series created a completely new political event. The police then exacerbated the already tumultuous situation by forcibly dispersing the crowd, causing it to move "like a tidal wave." In this context, it would seem probable that the aggressive police suppression would not have occurred with respect to a crowd of just one hundred-or-so labor activists or night market goers by themselves. This demonstrates how important the role of the Chŏngno urban space was in facilitating the qualitative development of a spontaneous riot event, as it directly precipitated the catalytic encounter between the two disparate series of shoppers and activists ("Minjung taehoe ch'amgaja" 1925).

In sum, here the space of "the street" played an important role in explaining the occurrence of these crowd riots in terms of the "politics of the event," the general characteristics of which are reflected in the episodes described above. This form of politically significant event can be considered as (a) "not a thing but a relationship between things," which forms through (b) "incidental encounter" (Yi Chŏng-u 1998, 145). In other words, the event was/is created through a chain of randomly formed relationships. What distinguishes the event from a "thing" or a "thought" is this relationality, something that is devoid of

organization, hierarchy, or causality. As such, in these cases the role of "the street" was decisive. By enabling the instantaneous formation of relationships between disparate actors this space facilitated the "serialization" of political events that directly challenged Japanese colonial authority.

(2) Emotion

An event's occurrence follows the expansion of an isolated incident into a wide-ranging field of actions and effects. Through this contact between different behavioral currents, the isolated incident is amplified, branches out in its consequences, and perhaps erupts once again through other events. If the street is the "spatial condition" enabling these political relations, then emotion is the event's "content," that is, the cause and effect of the contact and encounter between erupting actions (Yi Chŏng-u 1998, 149-54). This is because the convergence, intensification, and eruption of ostensibly unrelated actions into a political event is not a process of conceptualization or contemplation, by which the acting subject renders the prevailing situation into a conscious object. Instead it is the body's immediate and preconscious response to the immanent situation. In the 1920s Korean crowd riots, the most important emotion inducing such action was rage.

The riots that erupted on April 6, 1927 in Iri, North Chŏlla Province and Chŏrwŏn, Kangwŏn Province over a Japanese man's assault of a Korean child demonstrate just how important the emotion of rage was in the politics of turning isolated incidents into events. The Iri riot took place at the intersection in front of Iri Station on the Honam railroad line. It began with a Korean child fiddling with a bicycle that lay in front of a Japanese shop located at Iri Station Junction. Seeing this, the shop owner became enraged, then slapped the child's face and violently pushed him into the street, breaking his leg. A Korean passerby then intervened, and the situation turned into a large brawl as nearby Japanese joined sides with the shop owner, wielding hammers and knives. Before long, hundreds of Koreans had gathered. The fight was then broken up as dozens of police arrived on the scene and made multiple arrests, but the issue was by no means resolved. Besides the matter of the beaten Korean child, the Koreans had become further enraged by the violence of the knife-wielding Japanese passersby. Various organizations initiated a rally which consisted of thousands of people, encircling the Japanese residential quarter close to Iri Station. The rally escalated into a *manse* demonstration which occupied the streets of Iri for close to two weeks and refused to disband. Eventually the Iksan county governor (*kunsu*), sub-county governor (*myŏnjang*), and police chief finally relented by arresting the Japanese man who had assaulted the child and

the others that had used knives in the ensuing altercation ("Iri simin subaek" 1927; "Ilbonin ŭi p'ogŏn ŭro" 1927).

Here the initial emotional reaction arguably precluded any objective consideration of the situation prior to action, and this was true in many cases of street riots, in which events would unfold in a manner divorced from the incident that initiated them. For instance, on May 21, 1924, a riotous event occurred in front of a cinema in Seoul, in which a crowd of more than a thousand people assaulted two police officers. It first started with several drunk Koreans being accosted by the police who had arrived to contain the disturbance. This altercation then quickly progressed into a riot as Korean passersby shouted out that the police intended to arrest the men "simply because they are drunk!" As the crowd grew and incorporated people from within the Chŏngno night market, it then assumed the character of an insurgent nationalist struggle against the colonial police ("Umigwan chŏn e" 1924). One of the officers, who "drew a sword and waved it around," was able to escape to headquarters and request support, reinforcements which eventually dispersed the crowd. The collective beating of two Japanese police officers by a crowd of thousands on the major T'aep'yŏng-tong thoroughfare is in itself politically and socially significant. Nonetheless, the ultimate political and social substance of the event was far removed from its innocuous origin.

These crowd riots' rapid unfolding through emotionally driven action indicates that attempting to analyze them in terms of premeditated perception and expression would be a mistake. These events were not constructed through any form of objective rationalization, but through witnesses' spontaneous comprehension and their immediate physical responses—a fact which explains the inherent unpredictability of these events. In this regard the riots occurred due to the visceral emotive physical responses of bystanders (who were instantly transformed into participant actors), a fact that helps to explain the inherent unpredictability of these events. In other words, the cases examined here reveal that crowd riots emerged through the physical practice of oral dissemination, which conveyed witnesses' spontaneous emotional perceptions and responses, in contrast to witnesses' objective reporting of an event based on logical analysis.

This study therefore demonstrates that, in terms of the politics of the event, the crowd riots relied on the following three characteristics: (1) There is the event's "practicability." The word event refers to a situation, which is always a movement of and relationship between actions and their resulting effects, and never a specifically identifiable body, that is, person, organization, or idea. (2) There is "spontaneity" inherent to the event's movement. Its relational configuration conforms to contingent circumstance in terms of how it emerges

according to the dynamics of the event *in itself*, irrespective of the intentions of the subjects involved. (3) There is the "emotional" character of the event's content. The event's contingent path, above all, is created through physical and emotional perception (and utterances), not logical or conceptual perception (or utterances). As such, the event itself emerges as an independent expression.

2. The Politics of Numbers

(1) The Crowd as Majority

Thus far, the crowd riots have been examined in terms of the politics of the event, and a focus on spatial features (the street) and content (emotion). One may characterize this as an attempt to conceptualize the behavioral course of the crowd and its movement. Having defined the crowd's behavioral course as adhering to the politics of the event, we might ask through what concepts can the crowd itself as a subjective entity be defined?

A good place to start would be to identify the properties that the political event of the crowd riot has in common with the other terms that can be used for "crowd," such as "mob," "people," and "rabble." In particular, the crowd within the event could be said to constitute a "mass" or "majority," in comparison to the individuals outside such. What, then, is the significance of being in the numerical majority?

The answer to this question is revealed in a riot that arose on Namdaemun-t'ong in Seoul at around ten thirty in the evening of August 22, 1925. Koreans were gathered in the streets from Chŏngno 1-chŏngmok to Kwanggyo Junction (nearby the old headquarters of the *Chosŏn ilbo*), Ch'ŏnggye Stream, and Ŭlchiro Junction. The crowd stopped a passing tram, then removed five Japanese men, whom they proceeded to attack. When the Japanese escaped to a police box in Namdaemun, the crowd demanded they come out and threw rocks at the police box, breaking the windows ("Chaejagya Namdaemun-t'ong esŏ" 1925; "Namdaemun-t'ong soyo sakŏn" 1925).

This raucous crowd riot began with a fight between five drunk Japanese, who lived in the neighboring area of Chunghak-dong (now located in Chŏngno-gu), and five Koreans, whom the Japanese initially assaulted. This initial fight had taken a dramatic turn when the Japanese police arriving the scene completely sided with the Japanese. Intending to send away the Japanese perpetrators without reprimand, the police escorted them to the Yongsan-bound tram. In response, Korean bystanders who had witnessed these events unfolding became enraged by this lenient treatment and chased after the tram. As the perusing crowd increased in size, the Japanese perpetrators disembarked from the tram

and escaped to a police box located at Hwanggŭmjŏng 1-chŏngmok. The crowd then surrounded the police box, shouting "kill them!" The police again attempted to put the five perpetrators on the Yongsan tram, but the crowd, now consisting of hundreds, gathered in a nearby plaza to obstruct the tram's path, and threw rocks at the windows. Eventually, the crowd stopped the tram, got hold of the Japanese perpetrators and began to beat them. However, police dispatched to the scene from Namdaemun were able to help the Japanese escape once again to a nearby police box. The crowd shouted "give up the five bastards!" and threw stones at the police box. In the aftermath of this disturbance no official inquiry was even made regarding the original fight, nor were there any repercussions for the Korean rock throwers ("Chaejagya Namdaemun-t'ong esŏ" 1925; "Namdaemun-t'ong soyo sakŏn" 1925).

In part, this event was able to dramatically develop due to the open length of road (2.03 kilometers) stretching from Chŏngno 1-chŏngmok to Ŭlchiro Junction. This was rapidly occupied by a Korean crowd which surrounded and attacked the police box. However, looking back at the start of the incident, an important characteristic of this event could also be said to be that it began with a fight between two groups of five. This very quantifiability—the number "five"—signifies groups of identifiable individuals, whose names and addresses could be traced. Five is a number that can be broken down into discrete entities; it is, therefore, a number conveying the boundedness of the referent. But what about the eventual Korean crowd composed of "hundreds"? The description of a Korean crowd consisting of "hundreds" was of course qualitatively and quantitively different from that of the initial five Japanese troublemakers. In this context the significance of the term "hundreds" thus demands thorough analysis.

The Korean crowd on the scene of the incident flowed through the streets as if a single organism. At the same time, however, in terms of its unpredictable possibility to increase in size, this was also as a mass of infinite potential.[8] Within the politics of the majority signaled by this crowd, then, the hundreds was a "number defying numbers," eschewing the boundedness or discrete totality of an individual entity. This politics of the majority therefore simultaneously operates through dualities of infinitude and unity, infinite expansion and contraction (Jonsson 2015). It functions as an "intensity" of power transcending the arithmetical distinction between the "one" and the "many" or the "individual" and "a collection of individuals."

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8. Canetti (2002) designates this kind of crowd an "open crowd," stating that "the urge to grow is the most important attribute of this crowd."

(2) The Effect of the Majority: Terror

The crowd is both a single and infinite entity, and the most extreme way in which its energy erupts is violence. It is due to a fear of such violence that the crowd has traditionally been described in terms of "criminality," "revolt," "lack of responsibility," and "insubordination." As an attempt to directly and immediately contest authority, however, the violence of the crowd also connotes a political quality. Above all, the violent act of throwing stones at the police in a colonial space, in the sense that the stone-throwers reject the self-discipline and obedience of their internalized colonialism, is evidence of a fundamental political character (Fanon 1990, 35; Gandhi 2000, 140).

As demonstrated in the cases discussed thus far, the colonizer flees when (or even before) confronted by the violence of the majority. The cholera riots provide a typical example. Facing the crowd of thousands gathering in Kwanghwamun Junction, the police abandoned the Korean cholera carrier and fled to a nearby police box. In most of the cases discussed, the Japanese individuals involved in the initial altercation typically retreated to a nearby police station when the crowd gathered. Why did the Japanese choose to escape when confronted by the "inferior" crowd? What kind of political effect did numbers—specifically, the numbers of the crowd—precipitate?

On September 17, 1929 the chief of police in Tanch'on, South Hamgyŏng Province received a report of an officer killed by a crowd while on patrol at a local sports stadium. The officer in question, Ōmuro, was dispatched along with another officer, a Korean named Yi Yong-hwa, to monitor a soccer match marking the Korean Thanksgiving Day (*Ch'usŏk*) held at a school sports stadium in Sinch'ang-ri, P'ado-myŏn, Tanch'ŏn-gun. Upon hearing the news, the chief mobilized all the men under his jurisdiction to find the murdered officer, causing quite a commotion. While the report of the death itself turned out to be false, the episode shows how numbers control the logic of the politics of the event in which the crowd is subject.

The trouble initially began when the two officers had attempted to break up a fight between some drunk Koreans outside the stadium, at which point someone in the crowd of onlookers began to shout, "A man is dead! Grab the police!" Frightened by the sudden crowd, the Korean officer ran and hid near a railroad about four kilometers away. Some railroad workers then helped him escape to the nearest station. Stunned by "all the chaos," at some point later the Korean officer reported that the Japanese officer "would have been killed by the crowd." It was this baseless remark that provoked the police chief's extreme reaction ("Kunjung e tchokkin sunsa" 1929).

This incident provides yet another example that flight was the predominant

reaction of numerically inferior colonial forces when facing a crowd riot. This was a situation in which the crowd that had gathered to watch the soccer match declared its intention to harm the police officers. The significance of the crowd's number was reflected in the utter unpredictability of what it might do next, and it thus evoked the terror of uncertainty. In short, the confronted policemen's perception of the potential infinitude of the crowd provoked the reaction of flight.

Ultimately, it should be emphasized that in a singular event of conflict determined by numbers (the cause being irrelevant), the force of a potentially infinite number of opponents will overturn other circumstances of hegemony (colonial ruler and colonial ruled, learned and ignorant, those with weapons and those without). In spaces such as playing fields, plazas, and street intersections, where it is impossible to predict the number of people that might continue to gather, weight of numbers eventually becomes the dominant factor. The simple, starkly apparent difference between majority and minority—the overwhelming number of the crowd—thus elicits terror in the mind of the police tasked with facing this problem.

Conclusion: The Two Vectors of the Crowd and Their Dangerous Possibilities

In 1920s colonial Korea, the Japanese expressed concern over the political effect of the events of 1919, as reflected in the phenomenon of Korean crowd riots erupting on the street. Through the testimonies of these colonial occupiers, as provided in government documents, media reports and the like, this study has analyzed the compositional principles and political effect of crowd politics relevant to this context. It is tempting to qualify these demonstrations as insubstantive and historically unqualifiable. As entities they lacked specifiable subjects, organizational involvement, or an ideological rationale, and on top of that they dissipated as spontaneously as they emerged. However, this study demonstrates that if one otherizes the street-based politics of the crowd as insubstantial, one simply cannot explain the social power upon which the various institutional and non-institutional political spaces of the 1920s were based. While this power certainly enabled organized movements (both institutional and non-institutional) within the colonial political space, at the same time, it existed as a potential capacity of numbers, one defined by an uncontrollable directionality irreducible to its specific characteristics.

For this reason, one cannot state that the political capacity (i.e. *politique*

puissance) of the colonial crowds that frequently gathered and dispersed on the street inevitably served to oppose the oppression of colonial power, i.e. that it possessed a purely subversive character in the sense of leading resistance against colonial power. Indeed, this form of violent mass political power could also have the reactionary effect of reinforcing the ideology of the ruling order. A case in point is the 1931 massacre of Chinese by Koreans (with colonial authorities strategically passive) in response to the Wanpaoshan Incident, a bloody conflict between Chinese and Koreans in Wanpaoshan, Changchun, Jillin Province, China.

In this context, the politics of the crowd on the street in 1920s Korea primarily formed a latent foundation for other more consistent and concrete movements in the colonial political space. One can say that the politics of the crowd shaped the political dynamics of this period, albeit imperceptibly, as a threatening possibility, the direction of which was never predetermined.

• *Translated by Keiran MACRAE*

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