

Sun Yat-sen in Korea : Korean View of Sun Yat-sen's Idea and Activities in 1920s

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Following immediately after the March First Movement of 1919, Korea of 1920s witnessed widespread independent movements across Manchurian border, the Maritime Province of Siberia and domestic upsurge of socialist movement accompanied by the introduction of Marxist doctrine on the leading Korean newspapers and journals, followed by the founding of Korean Communist Party in 1925.¹ It was also the time of booming of newspaper journalism that took advantage of Japanese appeasement policy to soothe the enmity of Korean people broken out in 1919. Despite the severe censorship of the colonial ruler, newspapers managed to carry very often the news of armed activities of Doglipgun (military units for Korean independence) based in Manchuria against Japanese border-posts. The papers also printed not a few stories on the activities of provisional Government of Korea based in Shanghai.² Promi-

* This paper was read at the International Symposium on Sun Yat-sen

nent independent movement leaders like Yi Dong-hui, Park Un-shik and Ahn Chang-ho being in exile in Shanghai, the Maritime Province, Siberia, sent their messages, though sometimes deleted in part by the censorship, to their compatriots in the motherland on the newspapers. It would be rather natural therefore, that Korean people paid special attention to the political situation in China where their patriotic activists were staying and nationalistic and socialistic upheavals were taking place in the process of national liberation.

The two leading newspapers, the Chosun Ilbo and the Donga Ilbo, carried so many news from China respectively, which took up almost one third of the entire international news. It seems that both reporters and readers alike were anxious to find some hopes or suggestions for their future and tried to say what they had in mind indirectly by reporting revolutionary development in China. Here is a good example of Yi Yun-Jae, a nationalistic linguist with a socialistic inclination who eventually sacrificed his life in a Japanese jail for his fight to safeguard Korean language and script. Yi Yun-jae who stayed in Beijing from March 1921 through March 1924 contributed a number of reportage articles on contemporary popular movements of China ranging from student movement and women's movement to labour movement. Reporting student movement in Beijing of 1923 in a weekly magazine *Dongmyung*³, he introduced the "guideline of the movement" issued by Chinese Student Association, presumably quoting from *Quanguo xuesheng dahui tekan* (*Special Issue of National Convention of Students*), No.5, March 22, 1923. In the text of the reported guideline one can find following phrase; Japanese imperialism is not only the enemy of both China and Korea, but also the enemy of Japanese common people. Another example is seen in a report

printed in the Donga Ilbo on Sun Yat-sen who was expected to enjoy a massive welcome in Beijing by early 1925 ; the reporter did not hesitate to add a few words at the end of the report to express his nationalistic feeling by saying "Alas! When would our national leadres in exile such as Yi Seung-man, Yi Dong-hui or Ahn Chang-ho be able to show up their heroic figures in Seoul? For me, Mr. Sun's trip to Beijing does not seem to be just an event of someone else"⁴

Furthermore, Ahn Jae-hong, the most prominent and influential editorial writer of the Chosun Ilbo in 1920s concluded his essay entitled "Chinese Revolution and Its Political Meaning" with the following lines : "The political meaning of Chinese revolution could be summarized as how to get rid of imperialistic power from Far Eastern nations and break down present situation"⁵. He strongly suggested that a prospective lesson from Chinese revolution fell in with a way to liberate Korean people from the imperialistic yoke of Japanese rule. Reflecting probably this kind of notion, the Donga Ilbo dispatched a special correspondent to Kobe where Sun Yat-sen stopped in on his way to Beijing late 1924 and asked Sun for an article to print. Sun complied with the proposal and let his secretary Dai Qidao compose a draft which has never been completed presumably due to Sun's illness and his ensuing death⁶.

Koreans' interests in China was not confined only to the politics ; Hu Shih's article "Contemporary Thought of China" appeared in a special issue of January 1, 1924 of the Chosun Ilbo, and Guo Moro's poem "The Globe, My Mother" was translated into Korean by Yang Kon-shik and was printed in January 1, 1925 special issue of the Donga Ilbo. The same issue of the Donga Ilbo also printed an interview with Hu Shih who said that he hoped someday to be able to visit Korea. Hu contributed a

caligraphy to the issue which reads “I sincerely wish the future of Korea be a new one year by year!”

2

The two leading newspapers spared much space to the news related to Sun Yat-sen and Guomindang, along with the news on the political and military situation pertinent to Beijing warlord government. I have checked two papers to figure out how many news related to Sun and Guomindang were printed from 1923 to the early 1925. The months in which the papers printed more than 10 pieces of news were as follows ;

The Chosun Ilbo

1923

January 15 pieces

April 19 pieces

October 12 pieces

December 15 pieces

1924

August 13 pieces

October 12 pieces

November 31 pieces

1925

January 12 pieces

February 17 pieces

March 10 pieces

The Donga Ilbo

1923

April 11 pieces

1924

April 12 pieces

July 13 pieces

November 16 pieces

1925

January 14 pieces

March 10 pieces

From the figures above it becomes clear that the Chosun Ilbo devoted more spaces on Sun Yat-sen and Guomindang presumably because Ahn Jae-hong, the influential nationalist who had special concern on the China question and considered its solution as a guidepost for the future liberation of Korea, led the editorial policy of the Chosun Ilbo.⁷ The fact that the Chosun Ilbo employed more socialists as reporters is also attributable to the China inclination⁸. One can easily figure out a common feature from the above list in the way dealing with the Chinese news ; the remarkable increase of the reports on China in November and December of 1924, and also in January and March of the next year. Needless to say, these were covering the news on Sun's trip to Beijing and his ensuing death. Besides the reports of news, the editorials, essays and commentaries devoted to Sun and Guomindang were 11 pieces in 1924, 9 pieces in 1925 on the part of the Donga Ilbo ; 7 pieces in 1924 and 10 pieces in 1925 on the part of the Chosun Ilbo. To the illness of Sun Yat-sen of 1925 the two papers showed their sensitiveness; the Chosun Ilbo

reported on February 23 that three representatives of Korean Students Association in Beijing asked after Sun's sickbed at Peking Union Medical College Hospital⁹. On March 13 it also carried a story by a special correspondent Kim Joon-yon who, too, called Sun to inquire after his condition at a private house in Tieshu hutung, Beijing. Though they did not succeed in seeing Sun in person, their story surely reflect Korean sensitiveness to Sun's illness. The Donga Ilbo carried on January 1, 1925 a story of a special correspondent Cho Dong-ho who went to Tianjin to ask after Sun's health at Zhangyuan and succeeded in having an interview with the ailing revolutionary.¹⁰ On March 26, 1925, the Donga Ilbo printed a story by an anonymous writer with the penname of Choonjong-seng who even visited the house Sun stayed before his death and met Sun's family. The Chosun Ilbo reported on June 17, 1925, that at Korean YMCA house in Seoul a meeting in memory of Sun Yat-sen was to be held, but on June 1925 had to report that the scheduled meeting was banned by the authorities on the ground that "it would harm international relations".

3

Most of the Korean analysts agreed, in their assessment of the common feature of Sun Yat-sen's activities that Sun was a great idealist, albeit he suffered many setbacks and failures, devoting his whole life to make every effort to realize his own "ism". Let us take a few example. An editorial of the Chosun Ilbo entitled "Guomindang and Chinese Political Arena — What Will be the Furure Influences thereof?" stated that "Sun, being an idealist, is a man of clumsy impracticality. His strong

point, however, is from his strenuous effort and magnanimity". The Donga Ilbo's editorial "The Three Principles of the People" of February 28, 1924 pointed that "Sun is like a crane distinguished from a flock of fowls to the effect that he clearly professed his own 'ism' unlike most of East Asian politicians". The editorial went further to say that though the British and the Americans hated Sun and the Japanese failed to understand him, it did not harm his reputation as a (great) idealist. In commenting Sun's three stages of national construction, i.e. the stages of military governance, protective guidance and constitutionalism, the editorial pointed out that the strong center of the revolutionary power (hyogmyong-jok joongshim danche) should be a prerequisite for its realization, which, however, failed to have yet. In an editorial of May 16, 1924 the writer confirmed that Sun's idea was basically the democratic republicanism of American origin and alluded rather critically to Sun's alliance with Soviet Russia by saying that Sun's cause and idea were becoming (recently) somewhat unclear recently. The editorial commented that Sun should be remembered for his tenacious effort in pursuit of the realization of his "ism" as in the case of Lenin of Russia. The writer, presumably, the same one with the writer of the February 28th editorial, emphasized Sun's revolutionary attitude itself, rather than his revolutionary ideal. The Chosun Ilbo's editorial of May 20, entitled "After Learning that Sun Is Well", emphasized likewise Sun's devotion to his "ism" which should be taken more precious than his repeated setbacks in the real politics. The Chosun Ilbo, however, did not only value Sun's idealistic attitude but also his "ism" itself, especially that of the People's Livelihood. The Chosun Ilbo characterized Sun's cause as a social revolution. The reason the writer of the editorial compared Sun with Lenin was not

only because of the tenacity to the revolution, as the Donga Ilbo did, but for Sun's effort to realize the destruction of the monarchy, the liberation of people, the pursuit of democracy and economic equalization. In another occasion, the Chosun Ilbo praised Sun as a propelling power of the world revolution under the banner of Sanmin—zhuyi.¹¹ Here, one can see the difference of the evaluation of Sun between the two newspapers.

Korean people were no sooner startled to see the outbreak of the May Thirtieth Movement than the pathetic appreciation of Sun's activities and "ism" on the occasion of his death calmed down. Though both papers saw concordantly the rejuvenation of Sun's "ism" in the May Thirtieth Movement, the Chosun Ilbo was more active to appreciate sun's legacy of "ism" in the Movement. In an essay "Mourning Sun Yat-sen" of June 17, 1925 in memory of the one hundreds days of Sun's death, the Chosun Ilbo pinpointed the real power of the anti-imperialism out of Sun's "ism". The anonymous writer of the essay concluded that "Sun has never been a frustrated one. I believe that his idea is encouraging the followers in pursuit of the final victory". This kind of opinion might probably reflected the sympathetic attitude of some Korean socialists who tried to have a rally, supporting and encouraging the general strike in Shanghai, unsuccessfully to the official ban of the colonial ruler¹².

4

The most penetrating analyst of Sun Yat-sen's idea and activities of the time was Ahn Jae-hong, the chief editorial writer of the Chosun Ilbo. Though Ahn himself was not a revolutionary, he analyzed Chinese revolutionary movement led by Sun Yat-sen quite correctly at the time the

demise of the Beijing warlord regime was yet to be predicted and the liberation of China from the imperialistic power was far from to be realized. His view of Sun Yat-sen was illustrated well in a long article in 9 series entitled "Sun Yat-sen and Chinese Revolution" appeared in the *Chosun Ilbo* from March 16, 1925. As mentioned before, Ahn characterized the *Minsheng-zhuyi* as the core of *Sanmin-zhuyi* and as a sort of state socialism with the intention to induce foreign capital so that the modernized material construction can be realized. With regard to *Minzu-zhuyi*, he saw it as the composition of the dual elements, i.e. the Sino-centralism of the Hans in terms of the racial assimilation, and anti-imperialism. In explaining Sun's inclination toward Soviet Russia, Ahn attributed it to the cool treatment of Sun by the Anglo-American side. Ahn admitted that Anglo-American coolness toward Sun might account to Sun's unreal ideal, but he recognized that the coolness forced Sun to rush at his cherished ideal in order to break down the reality he faced with. Ahn criticized Sun's idea of five power government system anticipating that the system could not be able to work well since the supervisory power could be included in the legislative power, the examination power to the executive power. What Ahn criticized more seriously was Sun's appeal to foreign powers for the cancellation of the recognition of the Beijing government. He denounced Sun's idea to be a mistake that could be committed only by "a white-faced strippling". In another occasion¹³, Ahn commented the appeal to the effect that even if the foreign powers met Sun's demand, it would merely leave China to the hands of smaller warlords as there was no single power that might unify China. Therefore, the demand could not be advantageous to Sun himself, according to Ahn, because even if someday Sun's power became strong

enough to take over the very Beijing government, there would be no way to have an accession to the foreign recognition. It would be unwise, Ahn condemned Sun, to demand the cancellation of foreign recognition aiming merely to share some financial gain controlled by the foreign powers.

Sun's claim to overthrow the Beijing regime by military expedition was received rather coolly by the two leading newspapers, in contrast to rather affirmative appreciation of Sun's political "ism." In an editorial of February 2, 1923, the Chosun Ilbo made it clear that China might be in peace through national union of provincial autonomy(*gokuk ilchi ui yonsung jachi*; *Juguoyizhi de liansheng zizhi* in Chinese). In the editorial of October 14, 1923 the Chosun Ilbo advised the "leading pioneers of China" to cooperate with the central(Beijing) government to settle in shape domestic affairs, instead of staging military expedition despite of the feeble situation that forced Sun Yat-sen and his protegee out from Guangdong by Cen jiong-ming. The Dogma Ilbo also advised Sun, in an editorial of June 21, 1922 entitled "On the Downfall of Sun Yat-sen: What Will Be the Prospect of Chinese Unification?", to ally with Wu Pei-fu instead of aiming to march north and to "cease to show bluster and adhere to the concern over the false(nominal) governmental position". The writer of the editorial even commented further that the expulsion of Sun out of Guangdong might facilitate the unification of China through reinstation of the Old Parliament, succeeding in frustrating Sun's plan of northern expedition. In the days no reliable and effective means for the military expedition were foreseen, without having any outside support like that of the Soviet Russia, Korean analysts failed to see any sign of the military success on the part of Sun. With regard to Sun's idea of the

alliance with Duan Qi-rui, Ahn of the Chosun Ilbo restrained to criticize strongly. He stated, instead, that the idea seemed "not the best way".

5

The most severe criticism against Sun fell under Sun's Pan-Asianism based primarily on future Sino-Japanese friendship. Surely, there were a few sympathetic analysts who tried to comprehend Sun's pro-Japanese attitude as "not a blinding one", because he primarily sought for Japanese aid in order to utilize it for the realization of his "ism" just as he did make alliance with the Soviet Russia¹⁴. However, when Sun spoke out Pan-Asianism in Kobe, Japan, on his way to Beijing, and when Sun's words and deed attracted heated world-wide attention ever since the 1911 Revolution, Koreans reacted strongly against Sun's address. Ahn condemned Sun's idea as being "a rash one"¹⁵. The Donga Ilbo's correspondent Yun Hong-yol who interviewed Sun in Kobe asked Sun, "Do you think your idea of Pan-Asianism could be compatible with the present situation Korea is faced with?". According to Yun's report, Sun gave the following evasive reply: Surely, it could not be compatible with it. However, while in Japan, I would like to avoid to discuss Korean question fully.¹⁶ The concept of Asia presented in the Kobe address of Pan-Asianism, which was reported and attracted sensitive attention in Korea, by no means included Korea without which no sound solution of Asian question could be anticipated. Another essay of the Donga Ilbo by a certain Jo, entitled "Sun Yat-sen and Chinese Political Area" also severely criticized sun's Pan-Asianism¹⁷. The writer of the essay contended that Sun's idea was "silly" because the idea (of the Pan-Asianism) would be

provokative to the Anglo-American public. He went on saying that the Sino-Japanese friendship, the very base of Sun's idea of Pan-Asianism, would be of no avail since it would be certain that Japan would not be active for the territorial integration of China and the protection of the economic rights of China. It would be impossible for Japan to expel Anglo-American presence out of China by force and money in order to protect China's rights. On this very account, he concluded, Sun's Pan-Asianism was doomed to fail. One may argue that the critical view of Sun's idea of Pan-Asianism proposed by contemporary Korean analysts either misunderstood or partially understood Sun's idea. However, to Koreans of the day Sun's proposition of "stronger Japan" that might withstand the West based on Sino-Japanese friendship would certainly implied Chinese recognition of the continuation of Japanese rule over Korea.

6

In 1920s, Sun's thought was introduced to Korean people in many ways, besides the analysis and the commentary of it. In 1921, a certain Changhae-kosa published an article in a journal "After Reading Sun Yat-sen's Theory of Easy Action and Difficult Knowledge" in which the writer urged to accept Sun's theory to pursue urgent task of the construction of the new culture¹⁸. The writer opined that the self-evident task be pursued actively by accepting Sun's theory to get rid of colonial yoke. The Donga Ilbo printed on February 28, 1924 an editorial entitled "Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People and Three Stages of Revolution", and on November 3, 1924 "The Principles of the Three People".

On January 27, 1924, a special correspondent Cho Dong-ho of the Donga Ilbo introduced the full text of Sun Yat-sen's "Declaration on the Occasion of the Trip North" in his China reportage. More systematic introduction of Sanmin-zhuyi was seen by the late 1920s as the prospect of Guomindang victory over northern regime became clear and by early 1930s after Guomindang took over the warlord regime. A journal *Hyondae pyongnon* (vol. 1, no. 2: March 1927) printed a translation of "Guomindang and Sanmin-zhuyi" by a certain Politikus. *Choson-ji Kwang* (vol. 7, no. 7: July 1927) printed "Sun Yat-sen and Sanmin-zhuyi" and "What Is the Sanmin-zhuyi?" by an anonymous writer in a weekly magazine *Dongmyong* (vol. 2, no. 2: November, 1931). And "The Exposition of the Sanmin-zhuyi by Yi Jo-hen in *Bipan* (vol. 1, no. 7: November, 1931). Yi Su-song had written an essay of same title with that of Yi Jo-hen to publish in vol. 2, no. 6 of *Bipan*.

Ahn Jae-hong who, after the liberation from Japanese rule became active as national leader and assumed the vice-chairmanship of the Preparatory Committee for National Construction (konkook junbi uiwonhoe) concluded his long article in 9 series quoting an old poem :

Being in a remote place where no more mountain is seen
And no more brook flows,
I can not but deplore that it is hard for me
Even to sing a song or to cry

Presumably, Ahn might have many songs to sing and things to cry for, but he could not do so. Instead, he wrote essays on Sun Yat-sen and Chinese question to express implicitly what he had in mind. Let me introduce a local news printed in the Chosun Ilbo of March 23, 1925, the very day the last part of Ahn's long essay had appeared. It might illustrate

the humiliation that Korean people of the day suffered. The title of the news was “Absurd Superiority Complex”. The story was about the “absurd superiority complex” of a Japanese schoolmaster of a primary school for Japanese children. The schoolmaster, a certain Kataoka, refused a Korean dentist Hahm Sok-tae to check Japanese children’s teeth. Dr. Hahm was assigned to the school by Seoul Dentist Association. The reporter concluded his story by deploring the base illiberality and absurd superiority complex. What would be the emotional and rational response of Koreans of the day to this sort of absurd superiority complex of the ruler? What kind of song could they sing and for what would they wish to cry? One of the song they could sing at that time was the song of Sun Yat-sen.

End notes :

- 1) A noted economist Yi Soon-tak introduced the outline of Marxism in a long essay on *The Donga Ilbo* throughout May and June, 1923. A certain Shindo, too, contributed a long article to introduce Marxism to *The Chosun Ilbo* on October, 1923. About the founding of Korea Communist Party, see Kim Joon-yop and Kim Chang-soon, *Hankook Gongsan Jui undongsa*(History of Communist Movement in Korea), vol. 2, Seoul 1986 reprint, pp. 291-337.
- 2) To name a few, the *Donga Ilbo* reported the battles on January 7, 1925 with the title “A Big Battle of a Military Unit of Korean Independent Movement on January 1, near the Bank of the Huchang River. On January 9 issue, a report with the title” A Regimental Commander of a Military Unit for Independence Died in Battle against Japanese Border Police” was printed, and on January 13, a

report of a military action with the title "Three More Soldiers of the Military Unit for the Independence were Killed in Action" was printed.

- 3) On *The Quanguo xuesheng dahui tekan*, see *Wusi shiqi qikan jieshao*, part II - B, (Beijing 1979) p.801. Yi Yun-jae's China reportage is reprinted in *Seoul-dae Dongyangsahagkwa nonjip*(*SNU Papers On Asian History*) No. 11(Seoul 1989).
- 4) Cho Dong-ho, "Welcome of Sun Yat-sen", December 7, 1924, The Donga Ilbo.
- 5) *Hyondae Pyongnon*, vol. 1, no. 2(January 1927).
- 6) Cho Dong-ho, "Asking After Sun Yat-sen ", January 1, 1925, The Donga Ilbo.
- 7) Ahn Jae-hong served as the chief editorial writer of The Chosun Ilbo from September, 1924 to September, 1928, and later assumed the presidentship of the paper. see *Chosun Ilbo sa yukship nyon sa*(History of The Chosun Ilbo on the occasion of Its Sixtieth Anniversary) (Seoul, 1980), p.665.
- 8) A reporter named Shin Il-yong wrote the editorial entitled "The Political Relations of Korea and Soviet Russia" on Septemebr 8, 1925 and the Chosun Ilbo was suspended printing for the third time by the colonial ruler on the ground that the editorial denied the private ownership and Japanese polity, and expressed the discontent and the dissatisfaction against Japanese rule of Korea. It is easy to figure out socialistic inclination of the Chosun Ilbo from some of the titles banned for printing such as : "Solidarity for the Proletariat of Tongyang"!(October 19, 1924), "The Political Movement of Japanese Proletariat"(November 21, 1924), "Foreign Capital and Korean

Economy”(December 4, 1924), “Interview of Lenin”(January 27, 1925), “International Proletarian Woman’s Day”(March 6, 1925), “Hurrah for the Proletariat Under the Red Flag!”(April 20, 1925). These titles are from *Chosun Ilbo sa Yukship nyon sa*, pp. 401–403.

- 9) Yi Jo-hen, one of the three students, later in 1931 published articles on Sun Yat-sen’s Sanmin-zhuyi in *Bipan*(vo. 1, no. 7, November, 1931).
- 10) Cho Dong-ho and Kim Chunyon, represented the Donga Ilbo and the Chosun Ilbo respectively as the special correspondent in China became later the top leaders of the communist movement in Korea. see *Hankook Gongsanjui Undongsa*, vol. 2, p. 298 and vol. 3. 0.209.
- 11) “The Passing of Sun Yat-sen”by an anonymuous writer, March 14 issue of the Chosun Ilbo.
- 12) Chosun chongnyon chongdongmeng(Korea General Union of the Youth) and Seoul Chongnyon-hoe(Seoul Youth Corps), the socialist organization of early 1920s adopted resolutions to support general strike in Shanghai. But the colonial ruler banned to print the text of resolution. See June 17 issue of the Chosun Ilbo. The Seoul Youth Corps planned to hold a speech rally in support of May Thirtieth Movement but the rally was banned again by the colnial ruler. See June 17 and June 21 issues of The Chosun Ilbo.
- 13) “On Sun Yat-sen’s Appeal to Cancel the Recognition of Beijing Government”, the editorial of February 2, 1923 of The Chosun Ilbo.
- 14) “The Eventful Life of 60 Years--The Life of Mr. Sun Yat-sen”, an essay by an anonymous writer, January 28, 1925.
- 15) Ahn Jae-hong, “Sun Yat-sen and Chinese Revolution”, part 7.
- 16) Yun Hongyol, “Sun Yat-sen Emphasized Sanmin-zhuyi”, November

30, 1924, The Donga Ilbo. Sun's address on Pan-Asianism was introduced on the same day of the Donga Ilbo.

17) January 7, 1925, the Donga Ilbo

18) *Gaebiyok*, vol. 2, no. 3(March 1921).