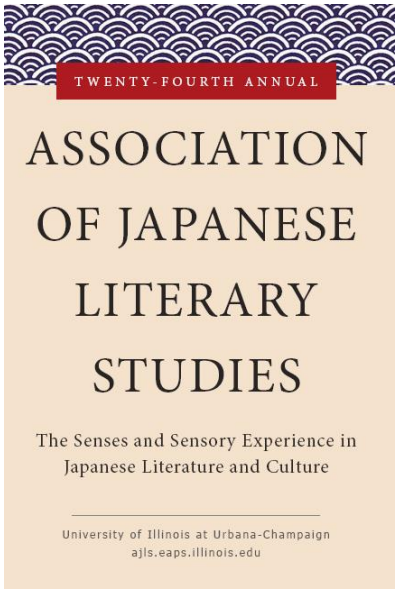
“Through Anxious or Confident Eyes? Visualizing the Korean Subversive in Taishō Detective Narratives”

Andre Haag

Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies 17 (2016): 10–20.



PAJLS 17:
The Senses and Sensory Experience in Japanese Literature and Culture.
Ed. Robert Tierney and Elizabeth Oyler

THROUGH ANXIOUS OR CONFIDENT EYES? VISUALIZING THE KOREAN SUBVERSIVE IN TAISHŌ DETECTIVE NARRATIVES

Andre Haag
University of New Mexico

How does one catch a colonized criminal who, in outward appearance, bears an uncanny resemblance to his colonizing pursuer? Alongside Japanese colonial discourse emphasizing the racial and cultural similarities uniting imperial subjects, it is possible to find scattered expressions of paranoid concern about the lack of visual markers separating Japanese and Korean people, and the attendant possibility of illicit passing by Korean lawbreakers. For example, a 1927 Justice Ministry report titled "Koreans in the Japanese Home Islands and their Crimes" looked back at the past decade's increase in crime among Korean residents of Japan, and confronted the accompanying challenges as follows:

> In the course of criminal investigations, one encounters situations in which Korean people pose as Japanese people. Meanwhile, in murder cases, it is occasionally necessary to determine whether the perpetrator was Japanese or Korean...Yet, it is not so easy to differentiate between Korean and Japanese people. This can be deduced from the great difficulty in telling the two apart at the time of the great earthquake of September 1, 1923, when people feared the mere mention of Koreans due to wild rumors."[1]

As postcolonial theory emphasizes, seeing is power. Surveillance of the colonized, often on the basis of outward racial markers such as skin color, has been described as "one of the most powerful strategies of imperial domination."[2] Homi K. Bhabha has explored the workings of a colonial "regime of visibility," which, in Lacanian terms, is fueled by the scopic drive to see the colonized in terms of fixed difference.[3] But in imperial Japan, it might be assumed that the police and public were denied the authority of visually identifying colonized Korean bodies because, as officials themselves pointed out, it was "not so easy to differentiate between Korean and Japanese people." Anxieties about Japanese-Korean differentiation surfaced most powerfully within the imperial metropole in the context of monitoring ethnic criminality and political subversion. At moments of terror, ethnic differentia-

[1] Arai Ikuzō, "Naichi ni okeru Chōsenjin to sono hanzai ni tsuite," *Shihō kenkyū* 5:17 (December 1927), 92.

[2] See the section on "surveillance" in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000), 185-86. See also the passage in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, which recounts the moment at which the black man is identified by a fearful white child and fixed in place with the words, "Look, a Negro.... Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!" Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 111.

[3] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 108-115.

tion and passing could become matters of life and death; in the wake of the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, for example, attempts to identify Korean criminals through paranoid eyes brought about the violent explosion of "Korean Panic" obliquely alluded to in the Justice Ministry report. As pointed out by the writer, that futile post-quake hunt for rumored anticolonial terrorists testified to the challenges of scopic differentiation, and ultimately resulted in the massacre of thousands of Koreans–and dozens of misidentified Japanese.[4]

Nevertheless, Japan, like other imperial powers, developed ways to "see" the colonized even in the absence of visible markers of difference. In practice, Japanese authorities relied on a complex mix of cultural clues, meticulous documentary records, and surveillance nomenclature like the term "*futei senjin*" (不逞鮮人, malcontented Koreans) to monitor potentially unruly Korean residents of the home islands.[5] Simultaneously, on the level of colonial discourse and culture, Korean subjects–and particularly criminals–were rendered visible in prose narratives. Bhabha's colonial "regime of visibility," it should be noted, is underpinned not only by the actual act of seeing but also by stories about colonized Others that must be anxiously repeated to give meaning to what is seen.[6] Similarly, in this paper, I will suggest that imperial Japan developed a distinctive, narrative-driven regime of Korean visibility, which was informed by an ambivalent mix of confidence in the policing gaze and anxiety about its unreliability. The operations of such textual modes of seeing Korean subjects are detectible in popular narratives about ethnic crime and detection produced after 1920. Reflecting the desire to visualize the Other as fixed difference, these narratives were inevitably drawn back to such visual and ocular-centric tropes as the "discriminating eye" (*kanshikigan*).[7]

Fictional detective stories and "true crime" tales featuring Korean characters first appeared during the early 1920s, and often drew their plots from the lurid newspaper reports of Korean independence activists' subversive activities and criminal conspiracies. This sub-genre has been overlooked in previous scholarship on Japanese detective fiction (*tantei shōsetsu*), which has given little attention to the

[4] For a detailed account on the vigilante, police and military violence against ethnic Koreans in September 1923, see Kang Tŏk-sang, *Kantō Daishinsai* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1975), and Kang Tŏk-sang and Kŭm Pyŏng-dong, eds., *Gendaishi shiryō*, vol. 6, *Kantō Daishinsai to Chōsenjin* (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1963).

[5] For an overview of the use of terminology and categories to monitor Korean subversion following the 1910 annexation, see Chōsengun Shireibu, "Futei Senjin ni kansuru kisoteki kenkyū (1924)," in Pak Kyŏng-sik, ed., *Chōsen mondai shiryō sōsho*, vol. 6, *1920-30-nendai minzoku undō* (Kawasaki: Ajia Mondai Kenkyūjo, 1982), 5-7.

[6] The stereotyped stories that Bhabha notes include tales "of the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability, or the stupidity of the Irish." Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 111.

[7] This focus on the eyes echoes Igarashi's observations about the ocularcentric privileging of vision as the "rational foundation of modern subjectivity" in interwar Japanese urban spaces that was challenged Edogawa Rampo's detective stories. Yoshikuni Igarashi, "Edogawa Rampo and the Excess of Vision: An Ocular Critique of Modernity in 1920s Japan." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 13.2 (2005): 299-327.

role of race and colonialism in the genre's development.[8] Interwar narratives that fixed their eyes on Korean culprits and red herrings thus provide rare glimpses of how Koreans and their criminality were rendered visible in prose, and how the dangers of misidentification and passing were narrated–or neutralized–by Japanese writers. My analysis of several works of early 1920s crime fiction, including Honda Kenzō's true crime fantasy, "The Min Won-sik Case," and Mori Sōtarō's detective novel, *The Korean Syndicate of Shadows*, will demonstrate how these narratives reassured readers that the trained eye of the Japanese detective could unfailingly ferret out the colonial criminal, thereby suppressing the fear of sameness. In the process of distinguishing not merely between ethnic Japanese and Korean subjects, but also between "bad Koreans" (i.e., *futei senjin*) and innocuous ones, however, this regime produced not a lack but a problematic excess of vision that, rather than clearly delineating colonial and imperial identities, resulting instead in cases of mistaken identity–sometimes with deadly consequences.

In the years leading up to the 1910 annexation of Korea, Korean people were treated as acutely visible in terms of both similarity and difference within the stories and images that made up Japanese colonial discourse. Revealing the twin assumptions of Koreans' racial similarity and cultural inferiority that underpinned the colonizing drive, writers in this period noted the uncanny resemblances joining the Korean and Japanese peoples, even as they insisted that a closer look could reveal crucial differences. Following his 1905 trip to the peninsula, for example, journalist Arakawa Gorō observed that the Koreans he saw "look just like the Japanese, of the same Oriental race, with the same coloring and physique, and the same black hair. If you ... did not look carefully, you might mistake them for Japanese." Arakawa, however, immediately added the vital qualification that "If you look closely, they appear to be a bit vacant, their mouths open and their eyes dull, somehow lacking..."[9] What is noteworthy here is the assumption, despite an overarching emphasis on similarities due to shared ancestors (e.g. the *Nissen dōso-*

[8] On the other hand, previous scholarship by Ikeda Hiroshi has emphasized how the colonies came to serve as the origin of mysteries and crimes in late-colonial and wartime Japanese detective novels. See Ikeda Hiroshi, *Kaigai shinshutsu bungaku-ron josetsu* (Tokyo: Impakuto shuppan, 1997), 6-45. In his analysis of earlier texts, Satoru Saito has drawn attention to the inclusion of a plotline exploring the racialized detection of Chinese criminals and victims in Meiji detective writer Kuroiwa Ruiko's 1889 novel *Muzan* (1889). Saito's argues that Kuroiwa's story both fuels fears about "the ease with which differentiation between a Japanese and a Chinese can be made problematic," and ultimately "reinforces a hierarchical relationship in which Japan and its citizens can understand themselves as occupying a superior position." Satoru Saito*, Detective Fiction and the Rise of the Japanese Novel, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012), 107-108.

[9] Cited in Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 398.

ron), that key differences in level of civilization (*mindo*) between Japan and Korea would be visually manifest if one simply looked closely enough.[10]

Once the Korean people were formally incorporated into the empire as "new Japanese" subjects, however, detecting visual differences came to matter most in the context of monitoring crime and political resistance among new Korean immigrants to the Japanese *naichi*. Reflecting one of the many paradoxes engendered by the colonization of Korea, the imperial regime's policy of assimilation (*dōka*) threatened to erase visible signs of cultural difference and replace them with less-detectable internal differences in ideology. The formal regime of police surveillance of Koreans in Japan dates back to 1911, when police departments across the country were instructed to monitor and document all Korean residents, keeping an especially close eye on the speech and actions of those harboring "anti-Japanese thought" (*hainichi shisō*).[11] But just how would these non-Japanese subjects be identified? A 1913 Police Bureau circular noted with alarm that, with the increase in Korean people adopting Japanese or Western-style clothing and hairstyles, it had become nearly impossible to distinguish between Korean residents and the home islands' Japanese that they had come to so closely resemble.[12] In response, the same circular provided "Materials for Korean Identification" (*Chōsenjin shikibetsu shiryō*) for use by officers in the field, which listed ethnic markers ranging from the distinct shape of Korean skulls to the way that Korean people spoke, walked or ate. Miri Nakamura has observed that these materials repeatedly stressed that Korean people were "not much different from Japanese *but...*" always went on to note minute ethnic distinctions.[13] On the topic of subtle differences in the shapes of Korean skulls, for example, the authors insisted that despite overall similarities "if one looks closely [*jukushi seba*]," the telling Korean trait (a certain flattening at the back of the head) would be revealed to the eyes.[14]

While police records conceded that identifying ethnic Koreans within the Japanese population was a difficult but not impossible task, fictional (and fictionalized) accounts of detection had a freer hand to render the criminal other immediately recognizable. Korean figures began to appear in stories of crime and detection in the early 1920s. The founding in January 1920 of a key venue for Japanese detective fiction, Hakubunkan's *Shinseinen* (*New Youth*) magazine, coincided with an era of heightened concern about the empire's "Korea Problem" following the March First Korean independence demonstrations of 1919 and the

---

[10] For an overview of the *Nissen dōsoron,* see Oguma Eiji, *Tan'itsu minzoku shinwa no kigen: "Nihonjin" no jigazō no keifu* (Tokyo: Shin'yōsha, 1995). In contrast with this discourse, protectorate-era guidebooks and popular ethnographies that stressed racialized cultural differences–often manifested visually–are discussed in Todd Henry, "Sanitizing Empire: Japanese Articulations of Korean Otherness and the Construction of Early Colonial Seoul, 1905-1919," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 64.3 (2005): 639–675.

[11] "Yōshisatsu Chosenjin shisatsu naiki," in Pak Kyŏng-sik, ed., *Zainichi Chōsenjin kankei shiryō shūsei*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: San'ichi Shōbo, 1975-1976), 23.

[12] Home Ministry Security Bureau, "Chōsenjin shikibetsu shiryō ni kansuru ken," in Pak, *Zainichi Chōsenjin kankei shiryō,* 27-28.

[13] Miri Nakamura, *Monstrous Bodies: The Rise of the Uncanny in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 64.

[14] Pak, 28.

postwar rise in migration to the imperial center by Korean laborers.[15] After 1919, Korean people were more visible than at any time since the annexation, but in the textual form of lurid newspaper headlines warning of criminal conspiracies by rebel groups. In dialogue with these daily news reports, writers of detective stories in *Shinseinen* magazine were quick to cast Korean characters in shadowy and menacing roles. Curiously, a number of these early stories sidestep the process of visual differentiation entirely. For example, at the heart of Takahashi Ginshū's story "The Mysterious Little Box," an "irregular" (*henkaku*) *tantei shōsetsu* from *Shinseinen*'s second issue (February 1920), is the specter of a Korean bombing plot aboard a Kobe-Shanghai steamship.[16] The would-be detective initially describes two suspicious figures he sees as follows: "The one who spoke was a tall, thin man with a black beard and a pale face. At a glance, the man appeared to be American [*ikken Beijin rashii*]. The other was a short, very shrewd-looking Korean."[17] With one look, the observer is able to determine that one man merely "appears American," while the other is without doubt Korean. The visual clues that facilitated this act of ethnic identification are not disclosed to the reader, thus intimating that the suspect's nationality was self-evident to the eyes. That established, the narrator's focus turns to whether the suspicious figure might be a "bad Korean," through a lengthy description of the mysterious "bomb-like" box that he cradles.

Similarly, another *Shinseinen* story from the same year, Hirota Kōgai's "Trial by Tiger," initially directs the reader's attention–and suspicions–to a self-evidently Korean character. Hirota describes this ominous Korean woman by emphasizing that she "spoke the Japanese language very adeptly, but was most definitely Korean [*masashiku Chōsenjin de aru*]. She was a tall woman of dusky complexion, and while her words were ridiculously polite, her demeanor was exceptionally surly."[18] Even fluency in Japanese cannot hide her obvious national origins. When her demeanor subsequently escalates from mere surliness to behavior described as "hysteria," it is through the dual prisms of ethnic identity and gender that her warnings are dismissively interpreted by the characters. Yet, the visibility of racialized identity itself is never in question within these narratives, for it can be established textually. Bhabha describes a colonial regime of visibility that is informed by "the bind of knowledge and fantasy, power and pleasure," and operates through "splitting and multiple belief"; in the fictional regime of visibility underpinning these stories, the fantasy is that, despite

[15] On the influx of Korean laborers to metropolitan Japan spurred by the First World War, and the emergence of a "generalised stereotype of Koreans as both a political and social antagonist," see Michael Weiner, *Race and Migration in Imperial Japan* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 56-62.

[16] Although this example and other stories discussed were explicitly labeled as "detective fiction" (*tantei shōsetsu*) by the magazine, they do not follow the conventions of the genre, or feature a true detective. Suzuki Sadami has noted that the category *tantei shōsetsu* was used rather promiscuously in *Shinseinen* issues from the early 1920s. Suzuki Sadami, *Shōwa bungaku no tame ni* (Tokyo: Shichōsha, 1989), 27.

[17] Takahashi Ginshū, "Fushigi na kobako," *Shinseinen*, February 1920, 42-55.

[18] Hirota Kōgai, "Mōko no shinpan," *Shinseinen*, April 1920, 177.

obvious Japanese-Korean resemblances, it is always possible to see criminal ethnicity, thus preemptively ruling out passing.[19]

Visual identification of a suspect's race or ethnicity is not, of course, all there is to fictional detective work, however: the use of non-visual clues and modes of reasoning (Poe's ratiocination) is also demanded in this genre. And, ironically, the facile visualization of Korean figures in these tales from *Shinseinen* never leads directly to the resolution of the mystery, but in fact generally serves to mislead aspiring detectives. In Takahashi's "The Mysterious Little Box," for example, the instant identification of the suspect's Korean nationality seduces the protagonist toward a paranoid misreading of the situation, with disastrous results. Thus, on one level, these narratives of crime confirm an imperfect regime of colonial visibility, while simultaneously subverting its utility.

Another ocularcentric crime story from *Shinseinen* that did foreground the problems of scopic identification was Honda Kenzō's 1921 feature "Crime Romance: The Min Won-sik Case," which retold an actual Korean murder case ripped from the newspaper headlines.[20] In February 1921, Min Won-sik, a putatively pro-Japanese Korean suffrage activist visiting the imperial capital, was stabbed to death at the Tokyo Station Hotel by Yang Kŭn-hwan, a Korean resident of Japan active in the independence movement. The high profile, politically sensitive slaying of Min, whom the *New York Times* called the "'Most Hated' Korean" due to his reputation as a collaborator, had prompted a nationwide manhunt for the killer that was excitedly reported by the Japanese newspapers–though with many omissions due to official interference.[21] Published nine months after the incident, in the November 1921 issue of *Shinseinen*, Honda's story re-ordered the murder, escape, investigation, and capture into a "how'd-they-catch-'em" narrative that foregrounded the complications of cross-ethnic detective work. After detailing the gruesome murder and suspect's initial flight, Honda recounts how quickly the detectives were able to identify the perpetrator by name and nationality. The Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, *Shinseinen*'s readers were reassured, employs an entire section of detectives specializing in Korean crime; once a suspect is "eyed" (*moku seraru*) as a *futei senjin*, the detectives need only "flip through their roster of names to immediately reveal everything about them from A to Z" (110). Yet, despite quickly identifying the perpetrator by name and establishing security perimeters in Tokyo, Yang was somehow able to slip past police dragnets and escape the capital. Honda thus anxiously poses a dangerous question: "Given that Koreans possesses characteristics distinct from Japanese people, why did veteran detectives have such trouble ferreting out one?" (111).

---

[19] Bhabha, 115.

[20] Honda Kenzō, "Hanzai romansu Bin Genshoku jiken," *Shinseinen*, November 1921, 100-113. Subsequent page numbers given parenthetically in the text.

[21] See the article reporting the murder of Min Won-sik (misidentified as "Bingen Shoku"), "'Most hated' Korean assassinated in Tokio: Bingen Shoku was for enfranchisement under Japan—others said to be marked for death," *New York Times,* February 23, 1921. For a brief description of Min and his putatively pro-Japanese activities, see Michael Weiner, *The Origins of the Korean Community In Japan, 1910-1923* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1989), 163 n140.

Although this briefly raises the possibility that there were actually no visible differences separating colonizer and colonized, the story's conclusion negates that threat by dramatically recreating the scene of scopic identification that led to Yang's capture. Just as the murderer, disguised as a Japanese carpenter, is about to depart from Nagasaki on a passenger ship bound for Korea, a patrolman's routine inspection of the third class cabin results in the final unmasking:

> "Where are you off to?"
> "I am traveling to Pusan."
> "Full name?"
> "I am △△△△" [*fuseji* blank type]
> "You're Japanese, then?"
> "Yes, that is correct."
> "A Japanese, eh?!"
>
> The officer's eyes focused fixedly on the youth's face. This was the moment to bring to bear his full powers of differentiation...
>
> "You're lying. You are not actually Japanese. You're Korean aren't you? You're Yang Kŭn-hwan, right?" (112-113).

This particular patrolman, the narrator explains, happened to be a former soldier with experience in Korea and thus "knew Koreans well" (112). He was aware that Korean people have a certain feature on the back of their skulls that sets them apart from Japanese–an unnamed characteristic that this youth shared. Recalling the news about Min's murder, the officer was able to capture Yang Kŭn-hwan just moments before he escaped forever to the colony. The story concludes, "At this moment of truth, the successful apprehension of a deadly criminal was the blessed gift bestowed by the discriminating eye [*kanshikigan*]. This remains a popular anecdote within the Metropolitan Police Department" (113).

Nakashima Tōbei, the Nagasaki officer who apprehended the culprit, did indeed enjoy fleeting celebrity in the wake of the incident.[22] Yet, the newspapers had offered differing accounts of how Min's assassin was actually caught at the scene, and none mentioned visual identification of that distinct characteristic of Korean skulls upon which Honda's re-telling turns.[23] What the *Shinseinen* story implies, however, is that when the lengthy rosters and advanced policing techniques of the metropolitan detectives failed to see the *futei senjin* Yang, it was a Nagasaki patrolman's experienced, discriminating eye that ultimately restored order by satisfying the demand for visibility.

The comforting resolution to the Min Won-sik murder case as relayed in *Shinseinen* was bizarrely inverted in an actual event in November 1921, when Prime

[22] See *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*, March 2, 1921, 2.
[23] One article suggested the officer was only able to *see* Yang because he was advised in advance to be on the lookout for a particular *happi* coat that the fugitive was wearing. See "Taiho no kōkei," *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun,* February 25, 1921, 5.

Minister Hara Kei was assassinated in front of Tokyo Station. Arresting officers at the scene confidently identified the assailant as a Korean extremist, a judgment relayed in hasty newspaper extras at home and abroad.[24] The killer turned out in fact to be Japanese nationalist Nakaoka Ryōichi. What this twist suggests is that discursively, regimes of surveillance were not blinded to Korean criminals, but instead produced an excess of unreliable, distorted vision that saw anti-colonial subversives everywhere.[25] This overproduction of Korean visibility corresponds to Ken Kawashima's observations of policing tendencies toward "a general misidentification of all Koreans as potential or probable criminals" which stemmed in turn from difficulties inherent in differentiating not only between ethnic Japanese and Koreans but, more problematically, between *futei senjin* and ordinary Koreans.[26]

What this murky and paranoid state of affairs demanded was a master detective with a penetrating gaze. The colonial detective story that took on such excessive visions of Korean criminality was Mori Sōtarō's wildly imaginative–and heavily censored–1921 novel *The Korean Syndicate of Shadows* (*Anchū hiyaku no Senjin-dan*).[27] At a time when many Japanese *tantei shōsetsu* took irregular forms that ignored the rules of this imported genre, Mori's stand-alone novel was decidedly conventional, to a point: it opens with the stock trope of a "locked room mystery," where the only clue left behind is a scrap of paper inscribed with the words "one small step toward revenge" (*fukushū no sasataru dai-ippō*) (22). The initial mystery to be solved by Mori's brilliant detective, Inspector Kumagai, is whether the culprit is a "*futei senjin*" or a Japanese "socialist" (41). It is quickly revealed, of course, that the novel's antagonists are the titular cabal of Korean thought criminals, who are involved in a wide-reaching independence plot. The mastermind, Pak Sengen, is described in great visual detail as a "splendid gentleman" who betrays "no shadow of the gloom [*in'utsu*] characteristic of Koreans" (33). Only the "pin-sharp observing eyes" (*hari no yō ni surudoi kansatsugan*) of Inspector Kumagai–and not the jaundiced eyes of those Tokyo detectives who indiscriminately hold Korean people in contempt–are able to see through Pak's public face as an upstanding Korean businessman and unmask the malcontent (*futei senjin*) lurking behind it.

Nevertheless, for much of the novel, members of Pak's Korean syndicate are able to elude capture in the heart of the metropole, thus presenting a dilemma. Is it possible that, despite the Metropolitan Police's stringent security perimeter, the Korean

---

[24] The headline of first extra issued by the *Ōsaka Asahi* newspaper on the day of the assassination, November 4, 1921, declared "Prime Minister Hara stabbed by Korean" (Hara shushō senjin ni sasare). See also "JAPANESE PREMIER STABBED TO DEATH BY KOREAN FANATIC," *New York Times,* November 5, 1921.

[25] As a contemporary account put it, most people imagined that Hara's assassination "must have been the work of deranged Korean" (*kyōbō na Senjin*), because no one would dream that a Japanese person was capable of such a dreadful act. Kusuzaka Takuma, *Chūō ekitō ni shisatsu saretaru tekketsu shushō Hara Kei* (Stabbed in front of central station, iron-blooded premier Hara Kei) (Tokyo: Daikyōdō shoten, 1921), 124.

[26] Ken C. Kawashima, *The Proletarian Gamble: Korean Workers In Interwar Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 154.

[27] Mori Sōtarō, *Anchū hiyaku no Senjindan* (Tokyo: Daikyōdō, 1921). Subsequent references to page numbers included parenthetically in text.

criminals are hiding in plain sight by passing as Japanese? The following passage puzzles over the problem, with a characteristic mix of confidence and anxiety:

> Within the empire, with its far-reaching security apparatus, a dragnet had been set up, one so rigorous that not even an ant, let alone a human being, could slip through. In particular, because the culprits were Korean, who have somewhat different appearances [*ikubun sōbō no chigatta*], there was simply no way that they could be missed. And yet, somehow they had escaped, as if they had flown away into the sky or burrowed underground to escape the security perimeter. Not a single suspect was caught in the net. (124)

The narrative never openly questions the basic premise that the true detective can distinguish between Koreans and Japanese, nor does it entertain the prospect that Korean subversives might be able to pass unseen as Japanese. In its insistence that Koreans "have slightly different appearances" (*ikubun sōbō no chigatta*), *The Korean Syndicate of Shadows* echoes the anxious assumptions of Honda's retelling of the Min Won-sik case. These distinctive visual Korean features are not spelled out in either text. But, *The Korean Syndicate of Shadows* subsequently neutralizes the possibility that ethnic Koreans perhaps might *not* "have somewhat different appearances," and have melted invisibly into the Japanese population, by revealing that the plotters had indeed "flown away into the sky"–using state-of-the-art aircraft to escape from the metropole to the colony.

But the unsettling problem of distinguishing between Japanese and Koreans is displaced in the text by the even thornier question of how to see the differences between "bad Koreans" and "good Koreans." As the plot balloons from a single locked room mystery into widespread riots and guerilla warfare on the Korean peninsula, it appears to Kumagai and the authorities that the entire colonized population might be in cahoots with the subversive cabal. "The trouble was," Mori's narrator explains:

> that there was no way to tell the *futei senjin* from upstanding Korean subjects. It would not do to just exterminate the Korean people entirely..."*Futei senjin*" seems to refer to just a minority of the Korean people, but as soon as the riots began, even those who appeared to be good on the surface rose up, cruel blades in hand. (143-145)

The Korean Syndicate of Shadows here stumbles onto a sensitive political dilemma of colonialism at the time. Taishō era colonial discourses after 1919 required the production not only of visions of malcontented Korean plotters, but simultaneously images and stories of the elusive "good Korean" so necessary for ensuring harmonious colonial rule. Conceding that all Korean subjects harbored subversive thoughts against the empire would have been tantamount to giving up on the project of colonial union altogether.

Kumagai's ingenious solution to this challenge requires an act of imperfect ethnic cross-dressing, which allows him to penetrate deeply into the "interior" (*naimen*) of his Korean adversaries' minds (154-155). The Japanese detective, disguised in the soiled

clothes of a Korean laborer, infiltrates a boarding house frequented by dissidents. This transformation, however, is ultimately revealed to be a calculated performance for Korean eyes, which see right through the "shoddy disguise" (*setsuretsu na hensō*) and identify him as an agent of the Japanese police (174). By making the surveillance of the imperial state visible to the enemy, Kumagai succeeds in flushing out the *futei senjin* hiding among the "good Koreans" (*zenryō na senjin*), the case is (provisionally) solved, and the scopic regime is restored. This twist furthermore resonates with Bhabha's incisive observation that colonial regimes of visibility do not merely ensure that the colonized are made visible to the colonizers through the repetition of narratives, but that in the same stroke colonial authority is made clearly visible to the colonized.[28] This, in essence, is what Kumagai's act of performative passing accomplishes. In sum, Mori Sōtaro's novel does not directly question the common sense assumptions of Korean visibility inherited from other texts. Yet, by shifting the focus to the impossibility of differentiating between good Korean subjects and subversives on sight, the novel is forced to concede that it might be necessary to "just exterminate the Korean people entirely."

That professed confidence that differences separating colonizer and colonized would be readily apparent to the policing eye was decisively called into question by the rumor-triggered Korean Panic that followed the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923. Once again, the Korean subversive could only be seen through the mediation of narrative, in this case popular rumors (*ryūgen higo*) about acts of sabotage and insurrection. The Tokyo Police Department's account of the post-quake Korean Panic proposed that it was the masses' untrained, "fearful eyes" (*kyōfu no me*) that had generated the groundless rumors of Korean rioting by showing them phantasmal visions of rebels masquerading as refugees and bombs that appeared to be harmless, everyday objects.[29] Repressed fears of criminal ethnic passing returned with a vengeance in rumors about "Koreans disguised as police officers."[30] In practice, vigilante mobs quickly acknowledged the impossibility of visually identifying ethnic Korean rebels and turned to such means as roadside language proficiency and pronunciation tests, as much scholarship on the "Panic" has shown.[31]

Significantly, contemporaneous print narratives reconstructing the panic and vigilante violence often returned to the problem of the eyes and vision, while sometimes parodying the logic of detective fiction.[32] And, in closing, I turn to one story of the Korean Panic that offers its own twisted reworking of the genre: Tokuda

---

[28] Bhabha, 119.

[29] Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department (Keishichō), ed., *Taishō daishin kasai* (Tokyo: Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, 1925), 456.

[30] Ibid., 451.

[31] On the use of language and pronunciation as an ethnic marker after the earthquake, see for example Kang Tŏk-sang. *Kantō Daishinsai* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1975) and Sonia Ryang, "The Tongue that Divided Life and Death: The 1923 Tokyo Earthquake and the Massacre of Koreans," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus,* September 3, 2007, online, accessed May 20, 2013.

[32] Sugamoto Yasuyuki in "Tantei shōsetsu, gunshū, Marukusu shugi" (1998) suggests that the logic of the post-quake Korean massacres and the investigations were a "terrible and grotesque inversion of detective fiction." Saito elaborates on this reading in *Detective Fiction and the Rise of the Japanese Novel,* 280-282.

Shūsei's 1923 "Fire Gun."[33] The narrative opens with a meditation on how the disaster, and rumors of a Korean uprising, had warped the vision of its detective protagonists: "All things reflected in the crime-searching eyes of the detectives were abnormally magnified, as if viewed through a microscope, and thus atrocities deemed impermissible from a humanitarian standpoint seemed, under these circumstances, simply unavoidable" (229) Tokuda's story features no Korean characters, and rather than culminating in the solution to a crime or identification of the culprit, these detectives are ultimately challenged to detect that there has been no Korean crime or conspiracy after all. The story concludes with a powerful metaphor for the colonial blinders worn by the authorities and public alike, when the character most convinced of the rumored (but non-existent) Korean conspiracy is forced to concede that he "was wearing tinted eyeglasses [*iro-megane*]" (244).

[33] Tokuda Shūsei, "Faiyagan," *Chūō kōron* 38, no. 12 (November 1923). Collected in *Shūsei zenshū*, vol. 6 (Kyoto: Rinsen Shoten, 1974), 229-245. Subsequent page numbers given parenthetically in the text.