



Caricaturing “traitors”: Communal reactions to indigenous collaboration in Japanese-occupied Korea

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Abstract

Under foreign rule, indigenous collaborators pose a serious challenge that betrays the trust and faith of their compatriots with whom they have long shared experiences. This being the case, the question arises concerning how the occupied define “betrayal” and execute their sense of morality and justice against those considered as switching allegiance from being their fellow nationals to being considered as outsiders. For this analysis, I investigate the practice of the Korean news media under Japanese colonial rule, developing the concept of verbal caricature. I find that the indigenous media create outrageous verbal images of collaborators: (1) sinners, (2) pawns, and (3) criminals. By exploring the media’s social justice under political constraint, this project contributes to the accumulation of knowledge on the unique practices of deviance-making, prompting a dialog between the two isolated research realms — social deviance and foreign occupation.

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1. Introduction

Foreign invasion creates social disruption and challenge, especially testing the foundation of morality that ties social members in an occupied world. When outside powers gain control over another country, a certain portion of subjugated populations comes forward to operate as the agents of the occupying forces, often undermining the interests of their own community with or

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without intention (Doyle, 1986; Fieldhouse, 1981; Robinson, 1972). From the viewpoint of the subjugated, such collaborative factions pose a serious challenge that betrays the trust and faith of their compatriots with whom they have long shared experiences (see Ben-Yehuda, 2001). This being the case, the question arises concerning how the occupied define “betrayal” and execute their sense of morality and justice against those considered as switching allegiance from their fellow nationals to outsiders.

Scholars studying indigenous collaboration argue that the purge of collaborators arises as a serious social agenda during the post-liberation period (Brook, 2005; Fu, 1993; Treat, 2012; Zanasi, 2008). When the occupying forces are removed, liberated nations usually begin to make those who have aided outside powers feel guilty as traitors, expressing their desires for justice against those perceived as having violated the norms of their community. However, the emergence of defining and purging collaboration primarily after foreign rule may overlook tense relationships between the occupied and those who collaborate at the moment of foreign domination. Indeed, it is a common practice that each community instantly undertakes some sort of policing against enemies from within, be they formal or informal (see Brubaker and Laitin, 1998).

Studies on social deviance have examined the formation of communal boundaries under drastic social changes; in particular, the news media have played a crucial role in establishing a series of categories that define deviance, contrasting them to valid and meaningful norms (Altheide, 1997, 2002; Cohen, 2002; Erikson, [1966], 2005; Frailing and Harper, 2010; Glassner, 1999; Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2009; Lauderdale and Estep, 2011). In the face of turmoil that utterly shakes the principles of the social world, the news media create cultural and political categories that establish the boundaries of values, beliefs, and social identities. Based on their moral stances and what they see as focal issues, the media inform the public of emergent threats that require immediate attention, further determining what they deliver to audiences and how they shape “what the population sees, hears, and reads” (Lauderdale and Estep, 2011, p.73).

In most studies, however, the news media has substantial latitude in delineating which deeds are acceptable; little research has shown how news organizations create the categories of deviance when their operational capacities are greatly restricted. Foreign occupation produces a structural constraint in which it is difficult for the occupied to not only challenge the foreign rule, but also openly police their “traitorous” fellow nationals. Given such challenging circumstances, the indigenous media has considerable limitations in defining who disqualifies as a community member. It is worth investigating how the media under the control of foreign occupiers characterize those who work for foreign occupiers as deviant.

In this spirit, I investigate Korean newspapers’ attempts to create the categories of deviance during the Japanese colonial rule of Korea from 1910 to 1945. Scholars have identified the roles of the indigenous media as operating either in opposition to or in support for Japan’s colonial policies (Caprio, 2003, 2011; Kim, 2000; Robinson, 1984; cf. Hwang, 2007; see section “Korean references”: Hwang, 2009b; Kim, H.-u., 2012a; Lee, H.-u., 2010a; Park, H.-H., 2005; Park, Y.-G., 2009b, 2012; Yoon, 2011, 2012). Yet, there is an empirical void regarding how the Korean nationalistic news media with limited operational capacities treated those who carried out ruling plans on behalf of outsiders in different punitive manners.

Moreover, scholars have meticulously excavated historical anecdotes that reveal immorality or (un)acceptable behaviors of those who collaborated with the Japanese colonial power, making their own scholarly judgments on those who worked for the occupying forces (Wells, 1988; Moon, 2013; Treat, 2012; see section “Korean references”: Chöng, 2003; Hwang, 2012;

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