

The U.S. Army and Korean Women in *Donga ilbo* between 1945 and 1965

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Abstract

This paper is an analysis of mid-twentieth century Koreans' cognition of the U.S. Army stationed in South Korea. It is very important to consider the way Koreans viewed the U.S. Army since it had a great influence on Koreans' attitude towards America. By examining articles relating it from *Donga ilbo*, one of the major Korean daily newspapers, this paper reviews Koreans' general perception of the American serviceman. Also, in some articles on a group of Korean women who had emotional and sexual relationships with them, it was found that the U.S. soldiers were less criticized than the women though their behavior should be blamed because of the enforced prejudiced gender role in those days.

Introduction

Although South Korea had had some exchange with the United States since late nine-teenth century, it was still a strange country to most Koreans in mid-twentieth century. A lot of Koreans learned about the country mainly through some movies, American missionaries, or those who had lived there for a while, so their understanding was indirect and fragmented. However, they began to have more direct, more

empirical knowledge about America with the arrival of its troops in Korea in September, 1945. It is very significant to survey the Koreans' cognition of the U.S. servicemen though they were not typical American people.

This paper reviews Koreans' perception of the American soldiers by analyzing articles in *Donga ilbo*, one of the major Korean daily newspapers, 1945-1965.¹⁾ Regarding the articles examined, a few points can be noted. First, in general, Koreans considered the U.S. servicemen stationed in Korea as good Americans. They were depicted as good aids for the post-war reconstruction and as well as nice people who were kind, warm-hearted. Of course, not every article showed positive images of them. Sometimes, they were viewed as arrogant, violent young men in some writings about accidents such as violence, gun-shooting, rape, or killing. Nevertheless, it does not seem that they were perceived to be liquidated. Also, such negative attitude towards them tended to be diluted: Their bad behaviors were hardly blamed in the articles about some Korean women who had emotional and sexual relations with them. They were able to avoid criticisms because those women were much more negatively considered.

Koreans' General Perception of the U.S. Army

Donga ilbo is one of the Korean major daily newspapers. It made its first appearance in 1920, was discontinued by the imperialist Japan in 1940, and was republished with the liberation of Korea in December, 1945. It published more than 2,000 articles, editorials, and criticisms about the U.S. Army between 1945 and 1965, which informed various aspects of it.

In general, the American servicemen stationed in Korea were regarded as nice Americans in *Donga ilbo*. They were companions on the battlefield and the best supporters for the rebuild-

ing. This cognition could be found in the provocative headlines such as "Over 130,000 of Death and Injuries: Noble Sacrifices of the Free American People(July 25, 1953.), "The U.S. Army Provided a Great Amount of Materials for Repairing the Roads Downtown"(September 7, 1954.), and "American Servicemen Helps Us by Water as Well: Aids for the Drought."(July 6, 1962.) Also, they were depicted as kind, warm-hearted, and philoprogenitive people. Several touching episodes were reported: American GIs rescued Korean orphan boys from danger, took care of them, or helped them go to the United States.

A private named William T. Evans found and made much of a Korean orphan boy who lost his parents. (...) He said to the chief of the local police station, handing over the child with him as follows. "I will take him to the United States when the war ends. Please take extra good care of him, and I will send money every month for the child."²⁾

One U.S. officer who did voluntary work for Korean orphans every weekend built a house for them at his own expense. His sacred deed moved us. (...) He himself made a survey of the building site, carried clay and sand, and sawed the timber. After two months of effort, he finally built two houses with nice little bedrooms and bathrooms. It cost about 300,000 won.³⁾

Of course, not all articles in *Donga ilbo* showed the bright sides of the U.S. Army. Often, some American servicemen caused troubles by committing various crimes such as violence, gun-shooting, rape, even or killing.

A 19-year old girl named Geum Im Jo was shot in the right hand by an American GI on the way home. When she was returning home after seeing a movie, an anonymous U.S. soldier suddenly turned up and shot her. By the gunshot wound to the right hand, she was in the hospital now.⁴⁾

A 16-year old boy who had collected firewood near the U.S. troops was shot by an American soldier on sentry. Although the boy was taken to a hospital and treated for the wound in the thigh, he unfortunately died the next day.⁵⁾

The motives of these felonious assaults were various. Some committed a misdeed by mistake, some purposefully, and some on the spur of the moment. No matter what they were, the atrocities the American servicemen had done boiled down to one simple word, *manhaeng* which means barbarity in Korean. *Donga ilbo* started to criticize them instead of remaining indifferently. For instance, one editorial in 1957 appealed to public opinion, expressing a deep hatred against the U.S. Army when similar accidents followed one after another.

Due to a series of shooting accidents and brutalities committed by American soldiers, Koreans' rage is approaching the bursting point. When the first murder case happened, we thought people who were abusive to Koreans would be just a few out of a number of the servicemen stationed here, considered it as accidental, and did not try to accuse them. However, what about the current situations?⁶⁾

Nevertheless, it does not appear that most Koreans wanted to fight tooth and nail against

the U.S. Army representing the United States. In spite of the endless demands for the withdrawal of the American soldiers made by some people, most Koreans still believed that the U.S. Army supported the Korean economy, protected Korea from the external force, especially from North Korea, and helped Korea support itself to the end.

Koreans do not think that the close friendship between Korea and the United States would encounter problems or break up because of a few accidents.⁷⁾

In summary, Koreans' general perception of the U.S. Army was positive as a whole. The American soldiers were viewed as friends to Korean public who helped Korea get through the tough times. Despite a series of humiliating accidents, they were accounted as mistakes made by some thoughtless young American servicemen. Still, the U.S. troops in Korea were regarded as benefit to most Koreans.

The American Soldiers in the Articles Relating Some Korean Women

As mentioned above, in spite of the antipathy to some American servicemen, the attitude towards the U.S. Army suggested in *Donga ilbo* was positive at large. Moreover, they were held responsible in some scandalous articles associated with some Korean women: The U.S. soldiers were able to escape the criticism because of the prevalent abhorrence to some women who had affairs with foreign men. Needless to say, it was the Korean women were blamed and depicted as indiscreet girls who fell for the American Fever.

The number of the Korean women who married the American GIs has been increasing. It is said that ten wedding ceremonies were already performed at Jeongdong Church and that most of them were held since this August. The increase of weddings is likely to be a result of the proclamation of the law which allows Korean women who marry an American serviceman to immigrate to the United States. Meanwhile, there are some unfavorable cases in which some naive girls who were infatuated with the American Fever married a delinquent American man who considers Korean girls as a sex toy. Under the circumstances, the eligible Korean women are required to have philosophy in marriage.⁸⁾

The American soldiers who were homesick and lonely searched for women wherever they went. In the beginning, so called intelligent women who were barely able to communicate in English at most and swarmed around them. The Korean women approached the soldiers with curiosity at first but came to like them because they were sweet to ladies. Finally, the women got blinded with many gifts from their American boyfriends.⁹⁾

As shown above, a group of Korean women were depicted as "naive girls who were infatuated with the American Fever" and "so called intelligent women who were barely able to communicate in English at most" just because they fell in love with American GIs and married them. In the first citation, the major controversial issue falls over "naive girls who were infatuated with the American Fever" rather than "a delinquent American man who considers Korean girls as a sex toy," so the eligible Korean women are required to "have philosophy in marriage." Similarly, in the editorials cited secondly, the editor quips that the young women "swarmed around them" and "got blinded with many gifts from their American

boyfriends," while he favors the U.S. servicemen who "searched for women wherever they went" just because they were homesick and lonely.

The American Dream was not the dream of the young Korean women only: Most Koreans had a fantasy about the United States and the preference for products made there. However, only these women were often regarded as those who were likely to abandon their family and motherland and to flee in search of the American Dream.¹⁰⁾ Such public opinions overrode well-known dissolute lives of some U.S. servicemen were concealed to some extent.

An unusual accident happened: One American serviceman tied up a prostitute's hands and feet and strangled her. Sleeping together with an American sergeant in her house, the 25-year old woman named Gyeong Ja Do was found dead. The murderer was arrested immediately and remained silent about the motive for the murder. It seems that the couple quarreled over the charge for 'short time' service and he killed her out of anger.¹¹⁾

In this article, the wretched death of a Korean woman engaged in military prostitution is described not as barbarity but as "an unusual accident." Moreover, instead of bringing up human dignity, possible diplomatic issues, or any nationalism, her death is simply associated with money in "it seems that the couple quarreled over the charge for 'short time' service."

Influenza is widespread throughout Beomjeondong, Pusan. An average of 3-4 persons catch a bad cold in over 100 households near the U.S. troops named Hayaria, and the number of patients is increasing day by day. According to the residents, this is how it happened. One American GI

returned from Japan had a terrible cold and infected a Korean prostitute. She then infected the family who ran a cleaner's at which she was a cus customer. The influenza is spreading out at high speed, and there are now over 300 patients infected.¹²⁾

This article says that one American serviceman who had been to Japan had a bad cold and then infected a woman through sexual intercourse. As a result, the influenza rapidly spread out in the area. However, different from the contents, it should be noted that the title contains a phrase, "it appears that a prostitute infected it." Instead of a U.S. soldier who carried the influ-enza first, one Korean woman had sex with him was spotted as an infector who spread influenza to 300 people.

In summary, in newspaper articles, the American servicemen were comparatively less blamed than some Korean women who had relationships with them because there existed over-all prejudice and repugnance towards the Korean women. Such aversion based on patriarchal and nationalist attitude towards a group of "corrupt" girls prevailed over the negative perception of the U.S. Army.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed Koreans' cognition of the U.S. Army focusing on the articles from *Donga ilbo* , 1945-1965. To summarize, the following can be noted. In spite of the unsavory accidents mentioned, the overall Korean attitude towards the American soldiers was perceived as positive. Especially, even if some servicemen committed misdeeds, the U.S. Army as a group was regarded as helpful to Korea. Also, there were some cases in which negative attitude towards the U.S. Army was covered up in some articles about the Korean women who had rela-tions with the American GIs. Although the sexual misconduct of

American GIs should deserve accusations, it is unreasonable that they were less blamed than the women who fell victim in most cases.

Nevertheless, the fact that Koreans' cognition of the U.S. Army was not entirely positive needs to be brought to public attention: Changes in such perception were in process. In the early twentieth century, many Koreans regarded America just as an affluent land full of gold-paved roads. However, in the mid-twentieth century, they began to get acquainted not only with bright sides but also with dark ones of America through ongoing contact with the U.S. Army stationed in Korea.

Footnote

- 1) 1965 was the year Koreans began to immigrate to the United States on a full scale influenced by Lyndon-Johnson Act. The author guesses that this massive migration would be one of the variables which changes Koreans' attitude towards the United States.
- 2) December 18, 1950, "A Beautiful Story: An American Serviceman Rescued and Took Care of a Korean Orphan Boy," p. 2.
- 3) November 27, 1958, "A Nest for Korean War Orphans: Humanism without Borders," p. 3.
- 4) January 24, 1956, "One American GI Inflicted a Bullet Wound on A Girl in Yeong-deungpo," p. 3.
- 5) March 26, 1961, "A Boy Who Collected Firewood near the U.S. Troops Was Shot by an American Serviceman," p. 3.
- 6) October 7, 1957, "Barbarities of the U.S. Soldiers and Responsibility of Korean Government," p. 1.
- 7) loc. cit.

- 8) August 27, 1947, "A Sudden Increase of the Number of Korean Women Who Marry an American GI," p. 2.
- 9) August 12, 1959, "Literary Gossip: Poor Translators, One Middle-Aged Woman Who Was Embarrassed, and Tragicomedy in the Early Period of the U.S. Army's Stationing," p. 3.
- 10) It was hard to realize the American Dream because Koreans' immigration to the United States had been limited for a long time. It had been prohibited for about 30 years in the early 20th century and after that, influenced by the new immigration law of 1952 named McCarran-Walter Act, which allowed only 100 Koreans every year immigrate to the United States. Marrying an U.S. serviceman in this situation was regarded as the best way to achieve it because Korean women who married an American GI were able to go to the United States influenced by War Brides' Act of 1945.
- 11) May 7, 1961, "An American Serviceman Who Killed a Prostitute Was Arrested," p. 3.
- 12) November 29, 1957, "The Second Asian Influenza Landed in Korea Also, (...) It Seems That a Prostitute Infected It," p. 3.

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