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Korean media under the American military administration (1945–1948)

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Abstract. Probably, the beginning of the pro-American trend in the development of Korean media was the editorial policy of the Korean media in the middle of the 20th century. This assumption is tested with the help of historical and typological analysis of the Korean mass media during the period of the American military administration in 1945–1948. In the context of the media, a characteristic of the political situation of that period is given. A comparative descriptive method and a classification method were applied. Previously unpublished information about the structure, language, and style, circulation, audience, thematic focus of two newspapers, the most popular at that time in Korea, is presented. In addition, the most significant personalities in the field of journalism of the designated period are identified. This study not only provides an insight into the political situation and journalism of 1945–1948 but also draws attention to the origins of the long-term influence that the United States of America had on the ideological transformation of the Korean media. It was discovered that at first the American military administration in Korea guaranteed and supported freedom of the press, then an anti-communist policy was inspired and mainly pro-American publications remained in Korea. Thus, it is from the time when Korea was ruled by the American military administration that the Korean media has been favorable to the United States and negative to its opponents.

Keywords: Korea, media, Korean print media, Korean media history, American military administration, Korean media, Korean journalism

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Корейские СМИ при американской военной администрации (1945–1948)

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Аннотация. Вероятно, началом проамериканской тенденции развития корейских медиа стала редакционная политика СМИ Кореи середины XX в. Это предположение проверяется с помощью историко-типологического анализа корейских средств массовой информации периода американской военной администрации 1945–1948 гг. В контексте медиа дана характеристика политической ситуации того периода. Применены сравнительно-описательный метод и метод классификации. Представлены ранее не опубликованные сведения о структуре, языке и стиле, тираже, аудитории, тематической направленности двух газет, наиболее популярных в то время в Корее. Кроме того, выявлены наиболее значимые персоналии в сфере журналистики обозначенного периода. Исследование дает представление не только о политической ситуации и журналистике 1945–1948 гг., но и обращает внимание на истоки долгосрочного влияния, которое оказали Соединенные Штаты Америки на идеологическую трансформацию корейских СМИ. Обнаружено, что сначала американская военная администрация в Корее гарантировала и поддерживала свободу прессы, но затем была инспирирована антикоммунистическая политика и в Корее остались в основном проамериканские издания. Таким образом, именно со времен управления Кореей американской военной администрацией корейские медиа благосклонны к США и негативны к их оппонентам.

Ключевые слова: Корея, СМИ, корейские печатные медиа, история СМИ Кореи, американская военная администрация, корейские СМИ, корейская журналистика

Заявление о конфликте интересов. Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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Introduction

The Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Korea Andrey Kulik, during a press conference on February 28, 2022, criticized the pro-Western position of the Korean media. Despite the fact that modern Korean journalism has undergone changes under the influence of leftist governments, and in recent years progressive media that share non-conservative views have gained popularity, the Russian ambassador's point of view is justified. Obviously, the coverage of events

related to Russia through the prism of European and American values finds a special response from the citizens of the Republic of Korea. The reasons for this phenomenon are in the history of the state and, accordingly, in the history of journalism.

Political contexts

On August 15, 1945, Japan signed the act of surrender in World War II, thus gaining Korea's independence. Against Korea's wishes, the Allied High Command proclaimed on September 2, 1945, that the USSR and the United States would exercise control over the north and south of the country. In the same year, on December 27, at the Moscow conference, the USSR, the USA, and England distributed custody of the Korean Peninsula between the USSR and the USA. The period after the liberation from Japan until the formation of the government was chaotic due to pronounced contradictions between left and right (Park, 1983, p. 150–151). The period of functioning of the American military administration in Korea lasted about 3 years: from September 8, 1945 to August 15, 1948. We are talking about South Korea (Roh, 1996, p. 278).

“After the liberation from Japan and until the end of 1945, more than 40 types of newspapers appeared. We distinguish three trends: firstly, the emergence of new newspapers as a result of liberation from oppression, and secondly, a number of publications were used as a tool in the political struggle. Finally, newspapers such as *조선일보 Chosunilbo* and *동아일보 Dong-A Ilbo*, which were closed during the Japanese occupation, began to be published again” (Kim, 1988, p. 176). This period has gone down in history as the golden era of political newspapers, the era of media revitalization, and the era of left-wing newspapers (Han, 2007, p. 36).

Initially, the US military administration in Korea guaranteed complete media freedom by changing the newspaper publishing system through the introduction of a registration permit. As a result, on May 28, 1946, there were 57 daily newspapers throughout the country and 49 weekly newspapers. Monthly newspapers, as well as bi-monthly newspapers, there were 154 publications.¹

If we take into account the initial stage of the functioning of the American military administration in Korea, we can divide the media into three groups according to political affiliation:

- 1) communist;
- 2) conservative, right;
- 3) progressive.

Media scholar Kim Min-Hwan identified the third group as being progressive democracy and actively supporting the united front movement (Kim, 1995, p. 7).

After liberation, the media industry was dominated by a large number of newspapers on the left (Song, 1990, p. 69). However, from the middle of this period, the American military administration in Korea, within the framework of anti-

¹ Yeojusisa. *Contemporary social culture: Newspapers after liberation to the 1960s*. (In Kor.) Retrieved March 12, 2022, from <http://www.yeju.go.kr/>

communist policy, began to oppress the left and their press, supporting the right and their publications. As a result, only pro-American right-wing newspapers remained (Kim, 2001, p. 21).

Characteristics of main newspapers

서울신문 “**Seoul Shinmun.**” This newspaper inherited the technical and human potential of the 매일신보 “*Maeil Shinbo,*” which was the property of the Governor General of Japan. For several months after Korea gained independence, Maeil Shinbo was the only newspaper in Korean, which aroused the interest of various political forces. As a result, after the reorganization of the newspaper and the coordination of policy with the American administration, it received a new name “*Seoul Shinmun*” (Kim, 2010, p. 157–159), and on November 22, 1945, the first issue was published (Kim, 2010, p. 181).

There were two versions of the newspaper: two-page and four-page. There were editorials, and domestic and foreign political news were the main topics of journalistic publications.²

As for the language, the newspaper was published combinatorially: the Korean alphabet and Chinese characters were used. This points to its potential audience: those who know Chinese characters (income above the middle class). A work permit from the American military administration in Korea meant a circulation limit of 100,000 copies (Kim, 1996, p. 340). Consequently, after the liberation from the Japanese occupation, it was the largest newspaper (Kim, 2010, p. 197).

The largest shareholder of Seoul Shinmun was the American military administration in Korea (Kim, 2010, p. 192) (after the liberation of Korea, the newspaper passed from the patronage of the governor general of the American military administration) (Kim, 1994, p. 369) Despite the similarities in its management structure with the official organ of the American military administration, Seoul Shinmun, due to its content, the latter was classified as a left-wing or neutral newspaper (Kim, 2014, p. 140).

경향신문 “**The Kyeonghyang Shinmun.**” The Catholic Foundation established the newspaper on October 6, 1946 (Kim, 1996, p. 345). In the background of the policy of repression of the left-wing media and with the support of the American military administration in Korea, the publication quickly gained popularity (Kang, 2007, p. 260).

During this period, the newspaper was published in two and four-page versions. The exception is the issue of January 1, 1947: then the newspaper was published on eight pages. The newspaper covered various topics: politics, economics, culture, life, advertisements were published.

The newspaper was published in a mixture of the Korean alphabet and Chinese characters.³ On September 26, 1947, the circulation was 61,300 copies (Kim, 1988, p. 187). This is the largest circulation among major daily newspapers in

² Electronic archives. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <http://archive.history.go.kr/>

³ Naver News library. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <https://newslibrary.naver.com/viewer/index.nhn?publishDate=1946-10-06&officeId=00032&pageNo=1>

Seoul as of November 1947. The newspaper was published in a mixture of the Korean alphabet and Chinese characters.⁴

According to Kim Bok Su's research, the United States defined it as neutral in 1947, and right the following year (Kim, 2005, p. 28). And the newspaper itself positioned itself as neutral.

Leading journalists

하경덕 **Ha Kyeongdeok** graduated from Harvard University, becoming the first Korean to receive a Ph.D. On September 5, 1945, he founded the English newspaper “The Korea Times.” He lead Seoul Shinmun, the newspaper with the largest circulation of all after the liberation, thanks to his acquaintance with the L. Bertsch political adviser of J.R. Hodge, the commander of the American military administration in Korea, with whom Ha Kyeongdeok studied at the university.⁵ He acted as a consultant to the US military administration and served on various committees of the US military administration in Korea (Kim, 2016, p. 222).

이종모 **Lee Jung Mo**. As the editor-in-chief of 조선통신 “Joseon Tongsin”⁶ during the Japanese occupation, he strictly adhered to a journalistic code of ethics, so people respected him (Song, 1990, p. 28) and unanimously decided to trust him to manage 조선기자회 “Reporters of Joseon.” He made repeated attempts to defend the freedom of the press from the US military administration in Korea (Korean Journalists Association, 2001, p. 146).

Conclusion

After the liberation from Japan, the USSR and the USA began to control the Korean peninsula. In this background, newspapers have become an instrument of political activity. At the beginning of this period, the American military administration in Korea provided freedom for the Korean media. Therefore, many newspapers were founded at that time, with more left-wing newspapers published than any other. In addition to the left and right, there were also neutral publications. However, from the middle of the study period, the American military administration in Korea began to pursue an anti-communist policy towards the media, so that in the end only pro-American right-wing newspapers remained.

Thus, under the American military administration in Korea, the main principles of the Korean media were formed: the complete exclusion of the left press, the consolidation of the right conservative press, the propaganda of anti-communism, and open pro-Americanism.

⁴ The Kyunghyang newspaper's 70 years of footsteps, 1946–2016. Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <http://www.khan.co.kr/aboutkh/history.html>

⁵ Jeong, J.S. *Journalists in liberation space*. (In Kor.) Retrieved October 10, 2018, from <http://kpfbooks.tistory.com/418>

⁶ Heo, Y. *Senior journalist Lee Jong-mo dies*. (In Kor.) Retrieved March 13, 2022, from <http://news.donga.com/List/Ec/3/all/19980505/7342516/1>

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