Social Exclusion on Vagrants in Modern Korean History: Disgust Behind Institutional Isolation

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This study analyses the affectivity of social disgust behind the oppressive exclusion of social minorities, such as the forced institutionalisation of vagrants in modern Korean society. This social exclusion of vagrants is divided into two forms: the forced institutionalisation of 'infected vagrants' during the Japanese occupation and the forced institutionalisation of 'vagrants themselves' during the developmental state. In both cases, the visible power apparatus of exclusion of minorities was socially legitimised by the effective use of disgust politics of purification and isolation. Through this analysis, this study joins the discourse on affective communities as a critical alternative to deinstitutionalisation by revealing the dynamics of the social disgust that threatens the community's existence.

Keywords: affect, disgust, vagrants, social exclusion, Korean history

INTRODUCTION

South Korea's relatively strong social cohesion is one of the main reasons for its rapid growth. However, looking back over the past 100 years, South Korean society has failed to build a community that is inclusive of others, such as social minorities. On the contrary, social cohesion has been effectively maintained by scapegoating the other. Social attitudes and policies toward vagrants are typical examples. The social exclusion of vagrants occurred in two ways. In the case of the 'infected vagrants' during the Japanese occupation (the 1910s–40s), vagrants were initially targeted for governance by incarceration in treatment facilities and to prevent the spread of infection. And in the case of 'the vagrants themselves' during the developmental state (the 1960s–80s), vagrants are formally targeted for governance by incarceration in facilities for their rebirth. Social exclusion is typically enforced through the visible devices of governing power, which generate citizen criticism and resistance to such policies and institutions.

But power effectively uses the invisible affects behind operating those devices – in this case, the affectivity of disgust – to eliminate that criticism and resistance.

This study aims to analyse the affectivity of disgust that operates behind the visible devices of social exclusion of vagrants in Korea. Based on literature sources, primarily newspapers, including other official documents, we conducted a content analysis on historical cases to analyse the conditions and methods of social exclusion of vagrants. Through this, we tried to describe how the action of power to conceal and exclude socially excluded beings such as vagrants is combined with the affectivity of disgust. This study will serve as a clue to expose the politics of disgust that threatens the existence of communities. In doing so, we hope to contribute to the discourse that criticises the oppressive institutionalisation of minorities and explores the possibility of affective communities as an alternative.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: THE VISIBLE APPARATUSES OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND THEIR INVISIBLE BACKDROP, THE AFFECTIVITY OF DISGUST

Social exclusion is used as an effective device for sovereign power. Violent apparatuses that socially define who is a minority and exclude them severely undermine human rights. Agamben (1998) explains how society is maintained through apparatuses of exclusion and inclusion and outlines how sovereign power establishes and strengthens sovereignty by assuming and proclaiming a state of exception in which the law ceases to be effective. And he warns us all that anyone can become a 'homo sacre'.

Social exclusion produces a state of exception through the visible and symbolic power apparatuses of institutions and norms. But it is also justified by the affectivity of disgust, which seeks to keep that which is dirty and contaminated away from individuals and society. For Rozin and Fallon (1987), disgust is the affective expression that accompanies the expulsion of toxic substances from the body when they are ingested, and rotting corpses, pollutants and infectious diseases also trigger this emotion. Furthermore, the experience of disgust can be transformed into socially discriminatory and exclusionary behaviour toward dirty or infected people. Douglas (2001) describes the cultural anthropological core of social disgust as purification and boundary setting (like social isolation).

Seigworth and Gregg (2010) define affect as the relationship of the microscopic forces that affect and are affected politically. Masumi (2015) argues that affect always operates invisibly among social actors when people who might otherwise be excluded from the relationship of power are pushed to the periphery of society by visible political apparatuses such as institutions and laws (Fig. 1). Disgust as an affect operates alongside visible institutions as well as in the background, and social exclusion becomes a more solid fact for citizens to accept. In the process, citizens experience 'purification' and 'isolation' as usual notions of social exclusion (Fig. 1). The discourse of deinstitutionalisation (Turner 2013; Moran 2013) argues for the affective communication of isolated people. Isolated people become affective bonds within the institution but experience the affects of divisive subjects who have difficulty adapting to society due to traumatic memories of social disgust experienced outside the institution.

In the following, this study attempts to explain why the visible apparatuses of social exclusion against vagrants in 20th-century Korean society were so violent and yet managed to function without much resistance. It focuses on the social affectivity of disgust that operated behind these apparatuses.
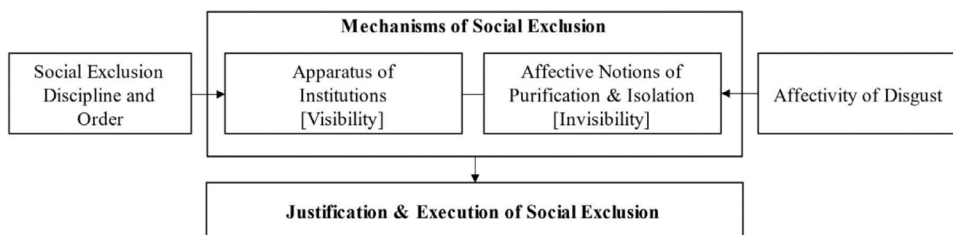
Fig. 1. Theoretical Framework of Research

DATA AND METHOD

We used content analysis to find trends and patterns from newspapers (Krippendorf 2010: 55–56) – a reproducible and valid method for making factual inferences from texts. The manifest content is the object of analysis, from which the latent meaning is derived. In the content analysis, the contextuality we focus on is a multidimensional arrangement of phenomena, places and events as opposed to a monolithic and homogeneous structure. In this study, we conducted data collection based on relevance sampling for data collection. Relevance sampling aims to select all textual units that contribute to answering a given research question (Krippendorf 2010: 122). This collection method is also called purposive sampling because the analysis problem defines it. The newspaper articles in this study were collected from the 'Naver News Library', an archive containing five daily newspapers in Korea from 1910 to 1992. Our analysis also included official government documents such as laws and reports. The collection procedure and main contents of the research data that we conducted are as follows (Fig. 2).
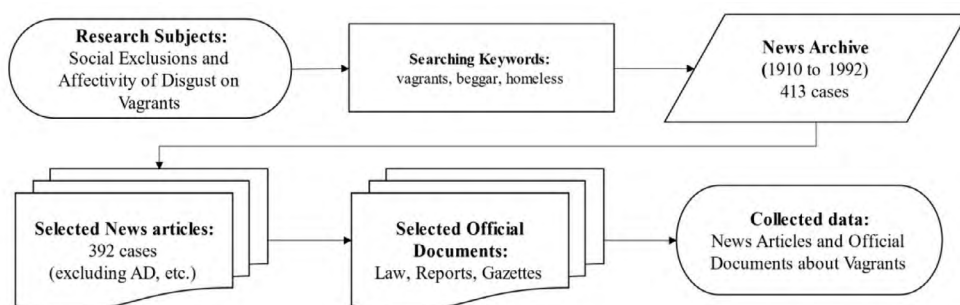
Fig. 2. Data Collecting Method

RESULTS

From Imperial Japanese Colonial Era to Korean War: Social Purification and Isolation of Infectious Vagrants

Vagrants have long existed in South Korean society. They first came to social attention in the 1910s when Hansen's disease patients were placed on life management of sovereign power. Newspapers of the time reported that the patients became physically disfigured and unable to work after their illness, wandered away from their homes in search of medical care, or voluntarily isolated themselves from society. Labelled 'vagrant lepers (*Burang-nawhanja*)' with the dual status of infectious disease patients and vagrants, they were forced into treatment and rehabilitation facilities.

In the 1910s, large cities such as Gwangju, Daegu and Busan had a few hospitals to treat patients with Hansen's disease. Still, Sorokdo Jahye Clinic (1917), a specialised isolation facility, was established on Sorokdo Island, far from the mainland. The state controlled this Hospital, but on the other hand, it operated independently with its prisons, schools, places of worship, etc. It was what Goffman called a total institution (Goffman 1961: 4–5). Promin, a treatment for Hansen's disease developed in 1941, was officially used in South Korea in 1947. And by the 1950s, with treatments like dapsone, patients were recovering, but the social stigma of contagion still forced them to live controlled lives in quarantine facilities across the country (Kim 2019b: 34).

During the Korean War in the 1950s, excessive forced isolation of vagrant patients to prevent infection gave way to prevention-oriented quarantine. During the war, infectious diseases such as smallpox and typhoid rapidly spread around the evacuation areas. The United Nations (UN) Civil Assistance Command Korea protected the stationed areas with the immediate quarantine of infected persons and preventive vaccinations to prevent transmission to UN forces as much as possible (Lee 2013: 338). These experiences made the epidemic a subject of social recognition. Then, after the Korean War, new disease prevention policies emerged for social safety in addition to disease policies centered on facility isolation. And this policy change also affects the policy on vagrants.

From the above analysis of the social exclusion by the politics of life management for infected hobos, we can understand three affectivities of disgust.

Firstly, psychologists argue that epidemiological and disgust mechanisms are related to the tendency to socially exclude vagrants (Tybur et al. 2018: 12; Patrick, Lieberman 2018: 133; Oaten et al. 2009: 305). The possibility of the unpredictable spread of infectious diseases or unsanitary conditions causes feelings of illness, vulnerability and pain. These material conditions of the infectious disease are projected to vagrants, and consequently, the affectivity of disgust was transferred to the infected vagrants, making them interpret as a social threat (Nussbaum 2001: 348; Jones, Fitness 2008: 625). Even after the actual threat is gone, the disgust is a stigma to them (Nussbaum 2004: 234). And these affective traits were also present in the vagrant lepers in the 1920s. After the Korean War, dictatorships reproduce hygiene-accustomed civic attitudes into metaphors for eliminating social irregularities. The 'human rat' episode is an example of social exclusion against the vagrants themselves, not the infected vagrants. In South Korea, in the 1960s, a campaign to catch rats that consumed food and caused epidemics was conducted nationwide, and the discourse of 'human rats', which personifies vagrants and homeless people as 'social rats', became socially popular (Kim 2010: 148).

The second is the affective characteristic of 'isolation'. In its geographical location, Sorokdo is a small island in the southernmost part of the Korean Peninsula. For the treatment to be effective, it must be located on the outskirts of a large city, but no reason is explained for its location, which is so far away that it must be reached by boat. According to the literature, the Japanese Government-General of Korea ordered it, and no other reason is explained (Kim 2019a: 131). This is an affective placement that makes the isolation of social minorities as a risk factor extremely visible. Even after they were cured, the lepers were forced to remain in quarantine due to the social notion that their infections and disgusting appearance made citizens uneasy (Kim 2019a: 125). They were forced to live in isolation, not only physically but also emotionally.

Authoritarian Developmental State in the 1970s and Early 1990s: Social Purification and Isolation of Vagrants

The content analysis reveals that since the Korean War, biopolitics for social security has been more concerned with policies to prevent future disease, i.e. health policies to eliminate and clean up unsanitary conditions. And this political tendency is projected onto social threats to ensure the continuation of the military dictatorship. As a result, dissidents (as reds) and vagrants (as garbage) are stigmatised as social hazards and forced to be isolated and purified. The rise of authoritarian regimes after the Korean War is the most crucial juncture for the violent social exclusion of vagrants from society.

The social isolation of vagrants in Korea began on a large scale with the establishment of accommodation facilities to aid war orphans and beggars, which increased during the Korean War. The Homeland Construction Organization (1961, *Guktogunseuldan*), Land Cultivation Organization (1965, *Tojigaecheukdan*), Regeneration Construction Organization (1970, *Gangsanggunseuldan*) and others were institutionalised by legislation as visible devices to exclude the vagrants socially. These organisations responded to the demand for labourers needed to build the infrastructure of developmental states. Hard labour, forced isolation and control of daily life by military discipline were typical features (Choo 2018: 223).

After the mid-1970s in South Korea, when the SOC for land development was completed, the number of vagrants who did not need to be recruited as labourers increased again, and many social welfare institutions emerged to contain them. In 1975, to deal with the growing number of vagrants, the Directive of the Ministry of Home Affairs No. 410, Guidelines for Reporting, Cracking Down, Accepting, Protecting, Returning, and Follow-up of Vagrants (1975), was published. This was the vagrancy that was officially defined in Korea for the first time. In other words, a vagrant (*Burangin*) was defined as a person who wanders around without a fixed place to live or work. Beginning with the 'Measures to Protect Vagrants' in 1981, a vagrant protection system was organised by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, a relatively large budget was allocated from 1982 to expand vagrant isolation facilities until 1986 (Lee 2015: 11). As of 1987, there were 36 facilities for tramps and vagrants in South Korea, housing 16,125 people (Dong-A Ilbo, 4 February 1987).

At that time, with government support, Brother's Home (*Hyeongjebokjiwon*, Busan City), *Sungjiwon* (Daejeon City), *Yangjiwon* (Chunchungnam province) and *Kwangsungbokjiwon* (Chunchungbuk province) operated under almost similar conditions, and Brother's Home was the largest of them all. The Brother's Home was built on the outskirts of Busan, South Korea's second largest city. Like the Sorokdo facility mentioned above, it was built for intense

social isolation. The facility covered an area of approximately 22,000 square meters and had 60 ancillary facilities, including a dormitory, elementary school, church, workshop, gymnasium, dining hall, warehouse and lodging (So 2020: 260).

This 'total institution' forcibly confined more than 3,000 people for more than ten years, including the mentally ill and orphans, and kidnapped citizens and tourists who had residences and jobs and committed them to forced labour, beatings and murder. When this facility, at which 657 people had been killed, was accidentally exposed in 1987, it was demolished and covered up by the South Korean government (Jung 2020). The case of Brother's Home is only one of the relatively detailed cases among the tragedies caused by the social exclusion of vagrants. However, through this event, the visible devices of social exclusion by the power were exposed.

This analysis explains the following two affectivities of disgust that became the background of the social apparatuses.

Firstly, in the authoritarian system that lasted for 30 years, from the 1960s to the 1990s, Korea effectively used the affectivity of disgust to calm social unrest. The Clean Sweep of Social Evils campaign, enacted in the 1960s to the 1970s, and the Social Purification Movement from the 1980s appeared in this social context (Choo 2018: 205). Vagrants played the role of 'homo sacer,' the social scapegoat needed to maintain autocratic power (Weinrib 2018: 334).

Just as curing an infectious disease evokes an affective image of purifying a body contaminated by disease, 'purification' is a signifier reproducing the social devices of disgust (Knowles et al. 2017: 114). The purification of vagrants removes something disgusting, such as dirt, disease infection and incompetence attached to them. Therefore, purification entails transforming rehabilitation and self-sufficiency and is connected to the welfare policies for the social exclusion and consequent resocialisation of the excluded subject. Purification of the vagrant is expressed in terms of *Gaeng-saeng* (rebirth) and *Ja-whal* (rehabilitation) in Korea. *Gaeng-saeng* is rebirth in the sense of having to be born again, and *Ja-whal* is self-support in sustaining one's own life.

Second, as Foucault (1988: 162) argued, rehabilitation facilities as a material apparatus that creates a purified and disciplined body draw a topological boundary separating minorities. The state-led coupling between meritocratic discourse and affectivity of disgust exists in the background where such large-scale violence could operate. People are disgusted by someone they perceive to be incompetent and act to exclude them socially (Rudert et al. 2017; Campbell 2009: 5; Miceli, Castelfranchi 2018: 223). The 1975 statute officially defined vagrants and made them subject to government control. Still, on the other hand, it also led to the stigmatisation of incapacitated people who had no regular place of residence and were not working. In recent interviews, they complain that they still feel the affective pain of exclusion and isolation.

Our analysis suggests that the institutionalisation of socially marginalised vagrants in Korea could be explained in two main forms (Fig. 3). The first thing was during the Japanese occupation when vagrants were first targeted for control. Vagrants were linked to Hansen's disease and were subject to life control. As infectious diseases are characterised by disgust, vagrants naturally became targets for social exclusion with social notions of purification and isolation. The other was the situation after the Korean War when disease prevention policies were implemented, and the vagrants became targets of control. Through the ideology of the developmental state, the dictatorship realised the goal of purifying social corruption for the regime's survival. In the process, various isolation facilities were set up, and the vagrants, who became a symbol of social decay, were forced to be isolated and purified with the tacit agreement of the citizens.
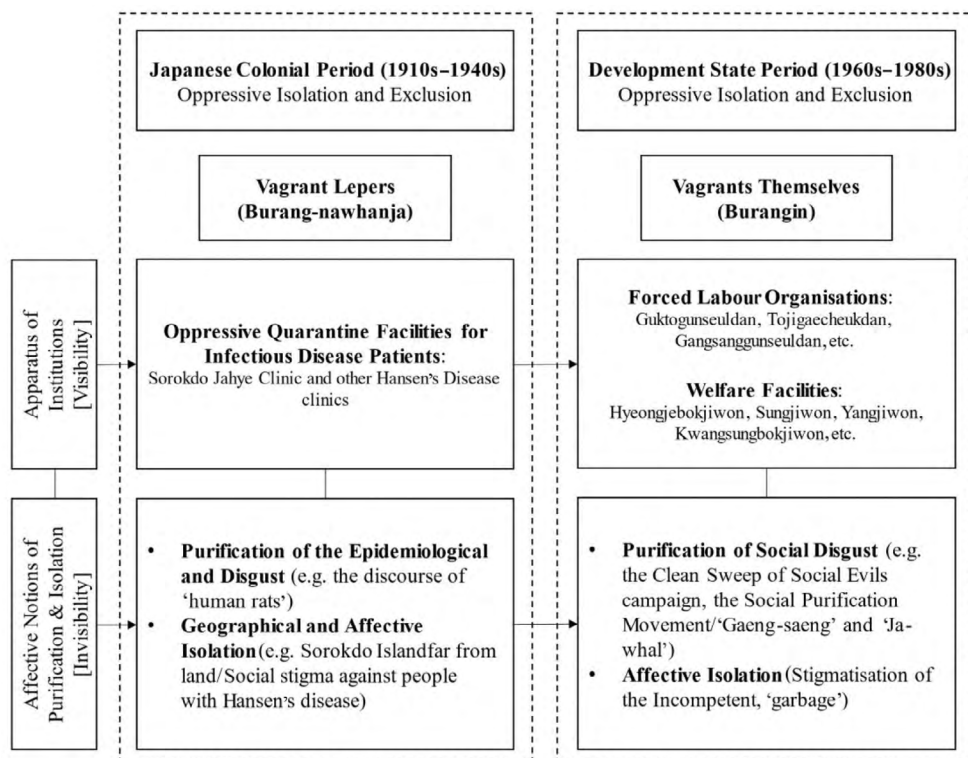
Fig. 3. Process and Components of Social Exclusion on Vagrants in Korea (1910's~1980's)

Since the 1990s, procedural democratisation has progressed, and South Korea has begun to accept the norms of the international human rights regime. The South Korean government has refined the broad notion of vagrancy to distinguish it from homelessness. The law defined the homeless as 'a person 18 years of age or older who has been living on the street for a substantial period without regular housing or has been placed in a homeless shelter as a result' (Social Welfare Services Act Article 34, Paragraph 4). And the government changed the law to protect vagrants, or homeless people, under that definition. But in South Korea, until recently, the primary policies for the homeless have focused on facility isolation. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, health authorities have identified them as a priority for facility quarantine owing to concerns that they may be a medium of infectious disease transmission. In the process, these homeless were exposed to more risk of infection. The lives of social minorities in this dilemma space have revealed the loopholes in welfare policies centered on facility isolation.

CONCLUSIONS

Institutional isolation to realise welfare policies has served as a visible device of life control for social minorities in Korea. As a total institution, enforced isolation has violated the basic human rights of social minorities, such as vagrants. Biopolitics has effectively operated institutions with

affective politics of disgust (social notions of exclusion with purification and isolation). It tends to quell citizens' resistance and make them consent to the policy on vagrants.

The discourse of deinstitutionalisation critically interprets Goffman's total institution analysis to emphasise thinking about spaces where social actors can be intersected affectively. By analysing the social disgust that operated behind the history of the institutionalisation of vagrants or homeless people in Korea in the 20th century, this study aimed to raise the need for research on healthy affective communities where the affective power of disgust (purification/isolation) does not operate. In that sense, this study is a foundational discussion of the deinstitutionalisation discourse.

However, since this study did not fully cover these details, follow-up studies are needed. In addition, this study analyses the overall flow of historical cases, showing limitations in an in-depth analysis of events by period. These limitations will also be supplemented through follow-up studies.

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Valkatų socialinė atskirtis modernioje Korėjos istorijoje: pasibjaurėjimas, slypintis už institucinės izoliacijos

Santrauka

Šiame tyrime analizuojamas socialinio pasibjaurėjimo afektyvumas, slypintis už slegiančios socialinių mažumų atskirties, pavyzdžiui, priverstinio valkatų institucionalizavimo modernioje Korėjos visuomenėje. Ši valkatų socialinė atskirtis skirstoma į dvi formas: priverstinis „užkrėstų valkatų" institucionalizavimas Japonijos okupacijos metu ir priverstinis „tiesiog valkatų" institucionalizavimas autoritariniu raidos etapu. Abiem atvejais matomas mažumų atskyrimo galios aparatas buvo sociali įteisintas efektyviai panaudojus pasibjaurėjimo politiką valymui ir izoliavimui. Šis tyrimas prisideda prie afektyvių bendruomenių diskurso kaip kritinės deinstitucionalizavimo alternatyvos, atskleisdamas socialinio pasibjaurėjimo, keliančio grėsmę bendruomenės egzistavimui, dinamiką.

Raktažodžiai: afektas, pasibjaurėjimas, valkatos, socialinė atskirtis, Korėjos istorija