

A Conceptual History Approach to Four “Collective Subjects” during the Colonial Period in Korea

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Abstract

This article offers a quantitative analysis of four concepts of “collective subjects” used in the Japanese colonial period newspaper *Donga Ilbo*. It is shown that “nation” (國民) appeared 757 times, “*minjung*” (民眾) 554 times, “the masses” (大眾) 341 times, and “people” (人民) 146 times, with “*minjung*” mainly being used in the 1920s, while the usage of “nation” experienced a steep rise from the 1930s on. “People” was used widely in the early 1920s yet almost completely disappeared after the mid-1920s, whereas usage of the concept of “mass(es)” peaked in the 1930s.

Qualitative analysis reveals that the use of “nation” was bipolarized in the context of domination and resistance, while “*minjung*” was often associated with domestic social movements, such as the Enlightenment Movement and the Independence Movement. “The masses” was primarily related to daily life of urban dwellers and the socialist movement,

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whereas the concept of “people” was rarely employed in the context of social movements. While the four concepts each showed distinctive characteristics, both “the masses” and “*minjung*” revealed the common feature of being used in reference to subjects of social movements, and therefore competed for prevalence in regard to contemporary issues concerned with social enlightenment.

Keywords: collective subjects, nation, *minjung*, mass(es), people, quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, usage

韓國日帝殖民時期的四種「群體主體」：

概念史研究觀點

許 洙

摘 要

本文以「國民」、「民眾」、「大眾」、「人民」概念為中心分析在日帝時期《東亞日報》記事標題上使用的「群體主體」。據數量分析，「國民」的使用次數是757次，「民眾」的是554次，「大眾」的是341次，「人民」的是146次。從時期來看，在二十世紀20年代「民眾」一詞的使用次數最多，到30年代以後「國民」一詞的使用次數激烈地增加了。「人民」一詞在20年代初顯示了高潮，中期以後一直保持低潮。「大眾」一詞的使用次數在30年代左右比較多。

據質量分析，「國民」一詞一邊在支配的語境上使用，一邊在抵抗的語境上使用，這可以說是一種兩極化現象。「民眾」一詞在啓蒙運動和獨立運動在內的社會運動方面頻繁使用了，「人民」一詞在社會運動方面就很少使用了。四個概念的運用特點大體上是這樣。另一方面，「大眾」和「民眾」的共同點就是兩詞都被看作社會運動的主體，「大眾」和「民眾」在相近時期在重要問題，如社會啓蒙等上，形成了競爭關係。

關鍵詞：群體主體、國民、民眾、大眾、人民、數量分析、質量分析、用例

A Conceptual History Approach to Four “Collective Subjects” during the Colonial Period in Korea^{*}

Soo Hur

Introduction

This paper aims, firstly, to examine four different concepts of “collective subjects” as found in *Donga Ilbo* (Donga Daily) headlines as part of an attempt to review the manner in which “*minjung*” (民眾) in particular was used during the colonial period.¹ Secondly, it attempts to establish a meaningful research methodology for the study of concepts in the colonial period in general.

With regard to the first objective, research on the concept of “*minjung*” has been conducted with a focus on “*minjung*” as used in the 1970s and

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¹ The concept of “collective subjects” is here roughly defined as “a multitude of actors who are treated as a group.”

1980s.² More recently, studies have been extended to the use of “*minjung*” and related “collectivity subjects” in the open-port period and the post-liberation era.³ While making reference to existing research findings, I believe that it is necessary to achieve a historical understanding of the conditions of the period in which the concept “*minjung*” was used for the first time in Korean society. Furthermore, a more precise understanding also requires a thorough review of other similar concepts. Therefore, in this paper I examine how four specific concepts referring to collective subjects — namely “nation” (國民), “people” (人民), “*minjung*”,⁴ and

² Jeon Myeong-hyeok, “*Minjungsa* noneuiwa saeroun mosaek (Discourse on the “History of the *minjung*” and New Ponderings),” *Yeoksa yeongu* (*Journal of Historical Studies*) 18 (2008); Jang Sang-cheol, “1970 nyeondae *minjung* gaenyeomeui jaedeungjang: Saho gwahakgyewa *minjung* munhak, *minjung* sinhakesoeui noneui (Reemergence of the Concept *Minjung* in the 1970s: Discussions in the Social Sciences, *Minjung* Literature and *Minjung* Theology),” *Gyeongjewa sahoi* (*Economy and Society*) 74 (2007); and Gang Jeong-gu, “*Minjungeun* eodeoke sangsang doieotna? (*How Have the Minjung Been Imagined?*)” (paper presented at the Proceedings of the fifteenth Symposium for the Korean Poetics Society, Seoul, 2005), 50-62.

³ Bak Mhyeong-gyu, “Gukmin, inmin, simin: gaenyeomsaro bon hangukeui jeongchi juche (Nation, People and Citizens: Political Actors of Korea in the Perspective of the History of Concepts),” in *Hanguk gaenyeomsa chongseo* (*Collected Works on the Conceptual History of Korea*) Vol. 4 (Seoul: Sohwa, 2009); Gim Dong-taek, “Daehan maeil sinboe natanan ‘minjok’ gaenyeome gwanhan yeongu (A Study on the Concept of ‘People’ Using News Articles in the *Daehan Daily*),” *Daedong munhwa yeongu* (*Study of Eastern Culture*) 6 (2008); Gim Seong-bo, “Nambuk gukga suripgi inmingwa gukmin gaenyeomeui bunhwa (Differentiation of the Concepts of People and Nation during the Nation-Building Period in South Korea and North Korea),” *Hanguksa yeongu* (*Journal of Korean History*) 144 (2009); and Hwang Byeong-ju, “1960 nyeondae bipanjeok jisikin sahoieui *minjung* insik (Awareness of *Minjung* in Critical Intellectual Society of the 1960s),” *Gieokgwa jeonmang* (*Journal of Memory and Future Vision*) 21 (2009).

⁴ In this paper, “*minjung*” is treated as a subcategory of “collective subjects,” just like “nation,” “people,” and “mass.” Despite this, “*minjung*” is transcribed in its Korean pronunciation, instead of English translation, for two reasons. Firstly,

“mass(es)” (大衆) — were used during the colonial period.⁵

What is no less important than the first objective is the pursuit of a methodology which enables the study of the usage of concepts in the colonial period.

due to the ambiguous connotation of the term it is difficult to find a direct English translation of “*minjung*.” Secondly, I would like to keep the Korean pronunciation because experiences of Korean social movements in the 1970s and 1980s as well as the colonial period are condensed in the term “*minjung*.” While I need to defer the task of investigating the meaning of “*minjung*” in the twentieth-century Korean history, let me briefly mention what the term generally meant in the early 1920s. It was in the 1920s that the term “*minjung*” was widely used in Korea. After the March 1 Independence Movement of 1919, contemporary intellectuals often tried to capture the activities of politically conscious Koreans in the word “*minjung*.” It was partly due to the influence of conditions in Japan that Korean intellectuals tended to use the term at that time. According to Haga Noboru, the concept of “*minjung*” began to circulate in Japan in 1913 during the initial period of Daisho democracy to denote violent groupings as opposed to the “mob,” a meaning which later expanded to refer to “people” in general. Furthermore, in Japan it developed a class connotation referring to the “middle class and below” while simultaneously keeping its general meaning of “people.” In contrast, the Korean term represented in effect the “whole membership of the Korean people,” an exemplary expression being “20 million Korean *minjung*.” See Haga Noboru, *Minjung gaenyeomno yeoksajeok byeoncheon (Historical Transformation of the Concept Minjung)* (Ungsagak: Tokyo, 1984), 351-352.

⁵ While “collective subjects” may include “ethnic group” and “crowd,” this paper attempts to start with and give special focus to the concept of “*minjung*,” and to deal with the four concepts under review with the intent of expanding its analytic horizon further, rather than to attempt a review of “collective subjects” in general. Therefore, “ethnic group” is excluded from the analysis. Actually, it is difficult to treat “ethnic group” in parallel with “*minjung*.” In my view, “ethnic group” is a higher concept, which deserves a separate extensive analysis, in view of its frequent appearance and significance. On the other hand, the concept of “crowd” may be discussed in parallel with “*minjung*,” but was not included in the present analysis for lack of ability. In addition, the term “citizen” appeared quite frequently, but was mainly used in the form of “citizens’ convention.” If it is to be included, I should also review “village people’s rally,” “district people’s convention” and so on, so it is also excluded from my analysis.

Both in Europe, the birthplace of conceptual history, and East Asia, especially China and Japan, the study of the history of concepts has made important contributions in specialized fields on the basis of locally available information and the particular infrastructure. In Korea, on the other hand, such research is still in its initial stage,⁶ thus necessitating a systematic accumulation of available information in order to establish a feasible research methodology. This paper tries to explore which methods can be best utilized to advance the study of concepts of the colonial period. I attempt to demonstrate a quantitative analysis of key concepts based on the database of “Newspapers and Magazines of the Modern Period of Korea.”

Donga Ilbo and “Collective Subjects”

Due to the absence of systematic research on the change and usage of the four concepts in question — “nation,” “people,” “*minjung*,” and “mass(es)” — during the colonial period, it is necessary to locate materials which enable a comprehensive observation of their changes over time. This paper takes the headlines of news articles in the *Donga Ilbo* as its main object of analysis for several reasons. First, focus on headlines is feasible due to the accessibility and convenience offered by the Korean History Database (KHD), which contains text images of *Donga Ilbo* articles from 1920 to 1962 and allows search by article title.⁷ Second, the

⁶ A good reference is Song Seung-cheol, “Miraereul hyanghan sotong: Hanguk gaenyeomsa bangbeoponeul dasi saenggakhanda (Communications for the Future: Rethinking the Methodology of the Conceptual History of Korea),” (Presented at the First International Symposium on Articulation and Transversality of Concepts in East Asia, Hallym University, September 25, 2009).

⁷ Currently, a total of 1.13 million articles from the *Donga Ilbo* are stored in the Korean History Database. Among them, 820,000 articles cover the pre-liberation period, and 300,000 concern the post-liberation period. “The online

material found in the Database is relatively even in quality and cover a long time span. During the colonial era, most magazines and newspapers, especially private ones, had tremendous difficulties in issuing publications on a steady basis. Only the *Donga Ilbo* managed to print newspapers daily in the period from 1920 to 1940, and resumed daily publication almost immediately after the defeat of Japanese forces in 1945. Such a plethora of material is a substantial starting point for research focused on comprehending conceptual characteristics of the colonial era and the subsequent changes of the post-war period.⁸

Searches of the four keywords, namely “nation,” “people,” “*minjung*,” and “mass(es),” in the database of the *Donga Ilbo* yielded a total of 11,333 hits, including both domestic and foreign reports made between 1920 and 1962.

database of the National Institute of Korean History homepage,” http://db.history.go.kr/front/dirservice/dirFrameSet.jsp?PREC_ID=8547&pUrl=%2Ffront%2Fdirservice%2Fcommon%2FlistLargeMain.jsp&pCODE=&pType=

⁸ To be sure, there are many limitations in assessing the historical usage of particular concepts on the sole basis of their use in *Donga Ilbo* article titles. However, it is reasonable to believe that the titles in the *Donga Ilbo* reflected the manner in which particular concepts were used among contemporary people in society, and, in turn, suggest the influence that their use exerted upon the readers. Therefore, in the sense that newspaper titles provide an important source of basic information needed to conduct research on the conceptual history of the colonial period, their analysis seems to have the significance of conducting a sample survey of how concepts circulated in society.

Figure 1 presents the frequency of the four concepts found in the titles.

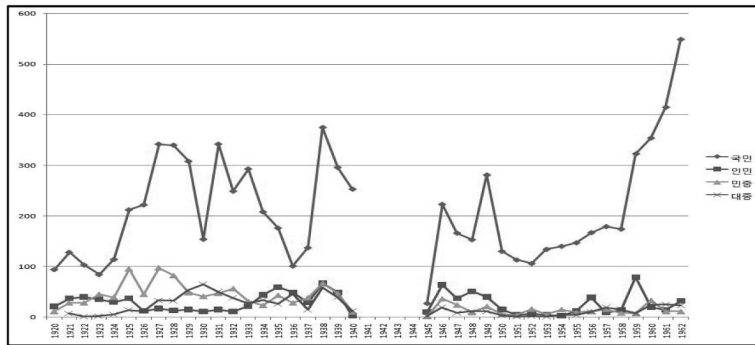
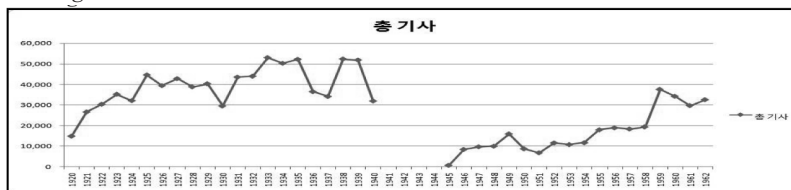


Figure 1. Frequency of the four concepts used in *Donga Ilbo* titles

Legend: Nation, People, *Minjung*, the Masses

According to Figure 1, the concept “nation” stands out in frequency in comparison to the others, a trend which is more pronounced during the colonial period and in the late 1950s. Then, in order to reveal real changes of concepts from Figure 1, it is necessary to compute the relative frequency. In this manner, the figure takes into account the change in the total number of articles published annually⁹ caused by fluctuations in quantity of publication,¹⁰ and suspension by the Japanese Government-

⁹ The figure below shows changes in the total number of articles published in the *Donga Ilbo*.



Legend: Number of articles

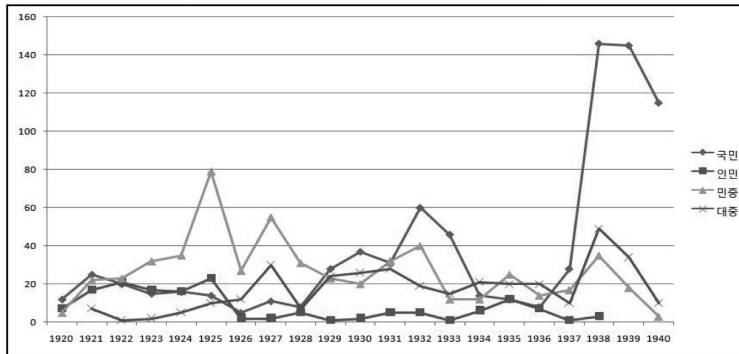
¹⁰ Covering 4 pages at the time of its launch, the total number of pages in the *Donga Ilbo* was raised to 8 in 1929 before being reduced to 2 immediately after liberation.

General of Korea.¹¹ To be sure, foreign reports can influence circulation of particular concepts among the readership as well as employing terms readers are already familiar with. However, in order to focus on understanding domestic usage of the concepts, it is crucial to exclude those which simply report on foreign incidents or merely cite names of organizations. However, reports on overseas activities of Koreans are treated as domestic news and included for analysis.

Table 1. Use of the four concepts in *Donga Ilbo* titles before and after liberation

	Domestic news	Foreign news	Total
Colonial period	1,798	4,868	6,666
Post-liberation period	3,944	723	4,667
Total	5,742	5,591	11,333

Figure 2. Quantitative change of the four concepts in *Donga Ilbo* article titles during the colonial period



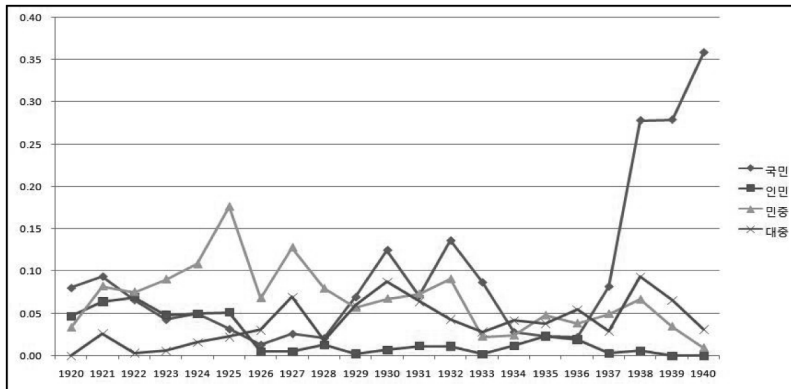
Legend: Nation, People, *Minjung*, Mass(es)

¹¹ During colonial rule, the Government-General of Korea suspended the publication of *Donga Ilbo* four times for a total of 569 days. See Bak Chan-seung, *Eollon undong (Media Movement)* (Seoul: The Korean Independence Movement History Compilation Committee and the Korean Independence Movement History Institute, the Independence Hall of Korea, 2009), 329.

Based on the above considerations and the data obtained from Figure 1, if we select the data for the colonial period we obtain Figures 2 and 3.¹²

Overall, the concept of “*minjung*” had the highest frequency in the 1920s, while the usage of “nation,” after a slow increase beginning from the late 1920s, rose drastically after the mid-1930s. In contrast, the use of the concept “people” declined in the same period and never really recuperated. Finally, the concept of “mass(es)” was most popular around 1930 and in 1938.

Figure 3. Change in the relative frequency of the use of the four concepts in *Donga Ilbo* titles during the colonial period



Legend: Nation, People, *Minjung*, Mass(es)

¹² Unlike the post-liberation period, the colonial period showed a similar trend in the change in absolute frequency and relative frequency of the total number of articles published. Because the results of absolute frequency as well as relative frequency are needed for analysis, I here refer to both Figure 2 and Figure 3 in this section.

Analysis of the Usage of the Four Concepts by Grammar Type

This section analyzes the respective usage of each of the four concepts while keeping in mind their trends in frequency of use. Table 2 is a numerical conversion of the absolute frequency of the use of each concept shown in Figure 2. In terms of total usage, between 1920 and 1940 “nation” had the highest frequency at 757 instances, followed by “*minjung*” (554), “the masses” (341), and “people” (146). In order to examine the usage of each concept, the matches found in the news article titles were aligned with their subject words, which are the smallest unit containing the meaning of the relevant concept. Efforts were taken to leave the form of the subject words used in the titles unadulterated. Through this process, 154 subject words were extracted for “nation,” 141 for “*minjung*,” 105 for “the masses,” and 57 for “people.”¹³

¹³ Despite it being the highest number of matches (757) among the four concepts, “nation” had a relatively small amount of subject words in comparison to the other concepts due to the high concentration of a handful of specific subject words. Examples were “National People’s Government” (87), “members of the National People’s Government” (86), “national spirit mobilization” (86), “nation” (35), and “national registration” (31). In contrast, “*minjung*” had a lower concentration of subject words, as shown by “*minjung* rally” (51), “*minjung* health” (26), and “*minjung* activists’ convention” (25). A notable feature of “*minjung*” was that it saw its highest usage in the sole form (134) among the four. “Mass(es)” was mainly used on its own (51), and the next most frequent keywords/phrases were “mass life” (31) and “consumer mass” (15), while the rest were used less than 10 times. “People” appeared on its own 69 times, and “people’s revolution” 8 times; each of the remaining subject words involving “people” were used less than 10 times.

Table 2. Quantitative change of the four concepts during the colonial period

Year	Nation	<i>Minjung</i>	Mass(es)	People	Total
1920	6	5	-	6	17
1921	16	22	7	17	62
1922	16	23	1	21	61
1923	15	32	2	16	65
1924	16	34	4	15	69
1925	11	79	10	21	121
1926	5	27	12	2	46
1927	11	53	30	2	96
1928	7	31	7	5	50
1929	24	23	23	1	71
1930	36	20	25	2	83
1931	31	32	27	5	95
1932	58	40	18	5	121
1933	46	12	15	1	74
1934	14	12	20	6	52
1935	12	23	20	11	66
1936	8	14	19	7	48
1937	27	16	10	-	53
1938	141	34	48	3	226
1939	142	19	33	-	194
1940	115	3	10	-	128
Total	757	554	341	146	1,798

In the next step the subject words were classified into three forms, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Classification of subject words and analytic meaning

Group	Form	Structure	Analytic meaning
1	Sole form	concept+suffix	Most fluid usage
2	Modifier-concept form	modifier+concept	Medium fluidity
3	Compound noun form	noun+concept concept+noun	Stable and official usage

“Sole form” refers to cases where the concept represents a self-sufficient subject. An example of this category is “the Koreans are a nation who respect manners” (*Donga Ilbo*, April 1, 1920), and it also includes the “concept+suffix” form, such as in the phrase “health concerns the nation’s life” (March 16, 1921). In this example, the relationship between the concept of “nation” and other words in the sentence, such as “health” and “life,” is weaker in comparison with the other two types.¹⁴

The modifier-concept form refers to cases in which a collective subject is modified by a word placed before it. A modifier can be a common adjective (e.g. ignorant *minjung*), a place name (e.g. *gusan minjung*) or a number (e.g. a mass of forty thousand). The modifier-concept form is less stable as a concept than the compound-noun form, which I will introduce next, but it is more stable than the sole form because it is combined with a place name, a number, or a common adjective.

The compound-noun form refers to cases in which a concept is combined with another noun to create a compound, such as “national school,” “*minjung* activists’ convention,” “mass entertainment event,” “People’s Revolution(ary) Army.” This form is often found in the names of happenings and organizations and can also be used as a term with its own meaning (e.g. “national school,” meaning an elementary school), thus acquiring the characteristics of stable and official usage.

Table 4 compares the distribution of the three forms for each collective subject. While “nation” showed a preponderantly large proportion of the compound-noun form, “people” was used in its sole form in nearly half of the cases. While “nation” and “people” were divided into

¹⁴ Compared to the “—+postpositional suffix,” “-ic” and “-ization” are idiomatic forms, and thus do not perfectly fit the sole form. Due to their limited amount I include them in the sole type.

the two opposite extremes, “*minjung*” and “mass(es)” lay in the medium range. For “*minjung*” and “mass(es),” the compound-noun form was the most common usage, at about 60%, while the sole form took up between 20% and 30%. Below, I employ the same typology to examine concrete cases of their usages.

Table 4. Distribution of the four concepts by grammar form

Form \ Concept	Nation		<i>Minjung</i>		Mass(es)		People		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Sole form	41	5.4	158	28.5	72	21.1	69	47.3	340	18.9
modifier-concept form	21	2.8	59	10.6	60	17.6	39	26.7	179	10.0
Compound noun form	695	91.8	337	60.8	209	61.3	38	26.0	1,279	71.1
Total	757	100.0	554	100.0	341	100.0	146	100.0	1,798	100.0

Compound noun form

Nation. As shown in Table 2, the concept of “nation” was used quite often, appearing more than 30 times between 1930 and 1933, and more than 100 times between 1938 and 1940. Important usages included wartime Government-General policy (299), the independence movement at home and abroad (219), life during the war (33), educational institutes (25), and pro-Japanese collaborators’ organizations (16).

Among usages concerning Government-General wartime control policy, the “national spirit mobilization campaign” ranked first (129), followed by the “spirit incitement campaign” (精神作興運動) (44) and national registration (36). Usages related to the independence movement, both at home and abroad, were in many cases associated with organizational names. The majority of them were about independence

activities overseas, particularly the National People’s Government (173).¹⁵

It can be seen that the usage of “nation” was bipolarized during the Japanese colonial period. On the one hand, in the final stage of colonial rule the Government-General referred to Koreans as a “nation” mainly in the context of wartime mobilization and control of Korea’s human and material resources. On the other hand, it was also employed by the independence movement organized by Koreans living abroad, particularly in Manchuria.

Minjung. Major uses of the concept of “*minjung*” concerned the independence movement, both at home and abroad (110), the enlightenment movement (44), health (40), drama and entertainment (15). With regard to the independence movement, it was mainly used for domestic activities, such as the “*Minjung* Congress Incident”¹⁶ (31) and the “Pan-Korea *Minjung* Activists’ Convention”¹⁷ (31), which represents a contrast with the case of “nation.” Among usages relating to the “enlightenment movement” were “*minjung* representatives” (mid-to-late 1930s), “*minjung* health” (1930s), “*minjung* theater troupe” (early

¹⁵ The National People’s Government was an independent activist organization, established in Manchuria in March 1929 by combining the Righteous Government, the New People’s Government, and the Army Government. (Refer to the content on the National People’s Government found in the Search Thesaurus on the homepage of *Korean History Online*.)

¹⁶ It refers to the incident in which 44 leaders of the New Trunk Association and 47 leaders of the Rose of Sharon Friendship Society were arrested by the Japanese on December 23, 1929. See *Hanguksa yeonpyo (Chronology of Korean History)* (Seoul: Hangilsa, 1994), 262.

¹⁷ It refers to the independence demonstration staged in Seoul in April 1925, in which “red flags” were held to protest against Japanese oppression. (See the content on Pan-Korea *Minjung* Activist Convention in the Search Thesaurus on the homepage of *Korean History Online*.)

1920s), and “*minjung* education” (late 1920s). Health-related usages, i.e. discussions of prevention of the spread of contagious diseases and in sports promotion, were concentrated in the early 1930s, while those concerned with drama and entertainment were prevalent in the 1920s.

Roughly speaking, usages of the concept of “*minjung*” in the period of colonial rule were predominantly associated with social movements, including the “Enlightenment Movement” and the “Independence Movement,” and partly with “*minjung* health” and “*minjung* culture.”

Mass / The Masses. The main use of the concept of “mass(es)” were in the order of book titles (41), depictions of life during wartime (35), drama and entertainment (26), and the socialist movement (21). For book titles, it was used for literary books (e.g. *Daejung munhak jeonjip* (Literary Collection for the Masses)), books for the education of farmers (e.g. *Daejung dokbon* (Textbook for the Masses) published by the Korean Farmers’ Press), and magazines (e.g. *Daejung* (The Masses)). The fact that the use of the concept “mass(es)” in association with the socialist movement appeared 21 times around 1927 allows us suppose that this concept was used in close connection with the socialist movement of Japan. The next most common usage were depictions of life during wartime, such as reports on widespread suffering under severe inflation especially in urban areas in 1938. Uses associated with drama and entertainment were frequently found in the early 1930s and late 1930s, and were in contrast with “*minjung*,” which was commonly used in the second half of the 1920s.

People. Apart from sole-form usages, “people” was the least-common concept among the four. When used, it was usually in combination with other nouns — as in “Northeast People’s Army,” “Northeast People’s

Revolution(ary) Army,” and “People’s Revolution(ary) Army” — mostly between 1934 and 1936. This compound noun form appeared only 15 times altogether, and only a few cases of the compound-noun form or sole form were found.

The modifier-concept form

As for the modifier-concept form, modifiers can be grouped into five categories according to their characteristics: place, number, class/strata, general/national reference, and other. Table 5 presents the accumulated numbers and percentages of cases along the five dimensions, whereas Table 6 provides concrete examples of modifiers. Combined, the two tables disclose some clear patterns as to the usage of the four concepts of collective subjects.

The use of “nation” with a modifier, which exhibited a low frequency, was generally in reference to children, as in “second-generation nation,” “little nation,” and “future nation.”

Table 5. Classification of concept modifiers and their distribution in the four

Group \ Subject	Nation		<i>Minjung</i>		Mass(es)		People	
	Place name	0	0	6	10.2	0	0	26
Number	0	0	7	11.9	4	6.7	4	10.3
Class/Stratum	0	0	2	3.4	52	86.7	0	0
General/national reference	1	4.8	37	62.7	3	5.0	6	15.4
Other	20	95.2	7	11.9	1	1.7	3	7.7
Total	21	100.0	59	100.0	60	100.0	39	100.0

For “*minjung*” universal-reference modifier forms had the highest distribution (63%), i.e. forms which referred to the entire members of a group — such as an ethnic group, a country, or the world — as shown in

instances of “world *minjung*,” “Japanese *minjung*,” “Korean *minjung*,” “peninsular *minjung*.” It was seldom used to refer to a class or a social stratum, except for “working *minjung*.”

Table 6. Words used as modifiers of concepts

	Nation	<i>Minjung</i>	Mass(es)	People
Places	—	Gunsan, Mokpo, Bukpyeong- myeon, Seongcheon, Yecheon, Cheonwoi (beyond the river)	—	seven myeon, each myeon, Gangseo, Goheung, Nampo, Dongnae, two- myeon, neighboring, three-county, near Seoyang, Seoheung, Sonæong-dong, Suncheon, Suncheong local, Anseong, Anak county, Yangpyeon, Yeon-do Yeongweon, Onæin county, Jeodo, Changseong Chuncheon, Taetan, Hongseong
Numbers	—	several thousand, multitude, several, 20 million	40 thousand, 10 thousand, 1 million, 13 million	250 thousand, multitude, about 200, about a thousand households
Classes/ Strata	—	working	working, blue-collar and farming, proletarian, productive, impoverished, adolescent, consumer, tenant, millet-eating demand, fishing, female, general consumer, young, student	—

General/ national references	pan-	world, general, Japanese, nationwide, pan- peninsular, pan-Korean, Korean, Korean general	general	ordinary, Korean
Others	second- generation, the fallen, the little, future, the second, home front	ignorant, newly emerging, victimized	suffering	sympathetic, innocent, local

In 87% of the cases, “Mass(es)” was used in combination with a modifier of class or social stratum, as opposed to the concept of “*minjung*.” In many instances, it was used together with words relating to occupation or work, such as “blue-collar,” “farming,” “working,” “productive,” “fishing,” “tenant” or “proletarian,” and sometimes with words referring to social strata, such as “young,” “student” or “female.” These usages existed from the mid-1920s to the early 1930s. Additionally, “mass(es)” was used to highlight aspects of consumer-subjects, as in the examples of “consumer mass” and “demand mass,” which were prevalent in the mid-to-late 1930s.

The concept of “people” was commonly used with a place-name modifier such as Gangseo, Goheung, Nampo, etc. Appearing exclusively during the first half of the 1920s, it was in contrast with “mass(es),” which appeared mainly in the second half of the 1920s.

Based on the results regarding the modifier-concept form, some preliminary conclusions concerning the relationship between the concepts

of “mass(es),” “people” and “*minjung*” can be drawn. Firstly, usage of “mass(es)” and “people” seems to present a contrasting picture — of increase and decline — in the 1920s. Under the influence of the socialist concept of “class,” the term “mass(es)” began to be used as connoting classes, strata, and urban consumer subjects after the mid-1920s. On the other hand, the concept of “people” “began to circulate in such a way that it implicated members with the identity of a community, such as a country or a region” between the open-port period and the Gap’o Reform in Korea,¹⁸ therefore its appearance with place-name modifiers in the *Donga Ilbo* might be seen as an traditional usage.¹⁹ Secondly, “mass(es)” is distinct from “*minjung*” in so far as the former possesses class connotations, while the latter refers to ethnic groups. This inference is based on the fact that “mass(es)” was often combined with class-related modifiers, whereas “*minjung*” tended to be used with universal-reference modifiers.

Sole form

Analysis of the sole form usages of collective subject concepts is quite difficult because they defy grouping. The sole type accounted for 19 % of all usages, as shown in Table 4, thus was certainly not a negligible portion. There were large variations among the four concepts: while “nation” was rarely used in its sole form, “people” took the sole form in half of the cases. A comparison of the sole-form usage of “people” and

¹⁸ Gim Yun-hee, “Geundae gukga guseongweoneuroseooui inmin gaenyeom hyeongseong (1878-1894) (Formation of the Concept “People” as Members of the Modern State: 1876-1894),” *Yeoksa munje yeongu (Critical Studies of Modern Korean History)* 21 (2009), 314.

¹⁹ Concerning its usage as a reference to unidentified multitudes, whether “mass(es)” had replaced “people” can be examined only through detailed analysis in future research.

“nation,” which are almost diametrically opposed, reveals the following:

Table 7. Change in the use of the sole form

	1920	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	Total
Nation	1	2	3	2	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	6	5	11	41
<i>Minjung</i>	4	6	3	7	14	8	12	16	21	6	4	8	8	5	3	3	2	3	17	5	3	158
Mass(es)	0	0	0	0	2	3	1	4	1	2	10	4	0	8	5	6	6	3	6	9	2	72
People	2	12	11	10	10	10	1	0	1	0	2	5	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	69

According to Table 7, “nation” was used in its sole form 41 times, a mere 5% of all of its appearances. In contrast, “people” took the sole form 69 times, as much as 47%, albeit only 1.5 times more than ‘nation’ in absolute number.

As for the sole-form usages of “nation,” in the early 1920s it was occasionally found in speech titles of youth associations and lectures, as well as when foreigners referred to people of other nationalities such as Koreans,²⁰ or in regard to issues of international concern.²¹ The latter cases cannot be viewed as being reflective of self-awareness of Koreans as colonized subjects. Exemplary uses of “nation” were found in the mid-to-late 1930s. From 1936, it was used mostly with regard to wartime control and mobilization. Specifically, the concept was employed in the context of national

²⁰ “ ‘The Korean people bear a majestic presence, love studying and working, address others solemnly, enjoy an elegant culture, and respect good manners. Only if education is widely provided, will they become a top civilized country in Asia,’ said the US Senator of California on his visit to Seoul.” Interview with Mr. Delsman W. Han, *Donga Ilbo*, April 1, 1920, 2; and “ ‘The German people are very active. Korean students have decreased a little. They hold rallies on March 1 Independence Movement Memorial Day and National Independence Day,’ said Mr. Bak Seung-cheol, returning home after studying history in Germany.” *Donga ilbo*, June 8, 1925, 2.

²¹ Interestingly, this 3-part series was written in Esperanto. “Gukmingwa minjokeui dangyeol sang, jung, ha (Solidarity of the Nation and the People, 1, 2, 3),” *Donga ilbo*, December 8-22, 1924.

integration — some examples being “national realization,” “thorough national preparation,” “national capacity for organization” and “national beliefs;” in extension, it was also used in the context of identity construction as it helped to distinguish the self from the “other,” such as the “national enemy.”

The use of “people” was most prominent in the early 1920s, yet decreased markedly by the early 1930s. In the period from the 1920s to the 1930s, “people” tended to be used in combination with words carrying negative connotation and which concerned victims, some examples being “illegal act,” “complaints,” “threat,” “disadvantage,” “great loss,” “beating,” “stabbing,” “exploitation,” “detention and imprisonment,” “denouncement” or “conflict.” Additionally, in a few rare cases the term was associated with “kindness,” “vitality,” and “self-realization.” The use of “people” for references to suffering and oppression was in stark contrast to that of “nation,” which was mainly employed in the context of agents of integration, in identity construction and in underscoring group solidarity. Furthermore, in light of the results of its modifier-concept form mentioned in the previous section, it becomes obvious that the concept of “people,” conceived as objects of politics and bearers of suffering, was used in a rather traditional sense, as opposed to a modern usage as agents of social movements.

Meanwhile, sole-form usages of “*minjung*” and “mass(es)” show clear differences from those of “nation” and “people.” “*Minjung*,” like “people,” was used, albeit only in 21 out of 158 cases, in conjunction with words carrying negative images (e.g. “*minjung* complaints,” “*minjung* are greatly discontented,” and “the ignorant *minjung*”). Most of the time “*minjung*” was used in a positive or neutral context, as in “*minjung*’s power,” “*minjung* and leaders” or “self-awakened *minjung*.” Notably, the concept appeared four times in the titles of lectures: “The Future is

for *Minjung*” printed in 1924 and 1925,²² Yeom Sang-seop’s (廉相涉) series of 7 essays titled “Korea and Literary Art, Literary Art and *Minjung*,” and in “Fiction and *Minjung*” in 1928.²³ In 1929, “*Minjung* and Cinema” appeared in three installments in the newspaper.²⁴ The fact that intellectuals released articles and essays highlighting the concept of “*minjung*” frequently in the *Donga Ilbo* vividly attests to the fact that the concept of “*minjung*” was being employed as an important instrument of national education and propaganda for social movements.

It is furthermore crucial to examine usages of the concept of “mass(es)” in connection with usages of social movements. The sole-form use of “mass(es)” first appeared in 1924 and peaked in 1930. Rarely associated with negative images, it mainly exhibited neutral or positive connotations similar to “*minjung*.” In particular, “mass(es)” was used for titles of serialized articles, another feature comparable to “*minjung*.”

²² “New Youth Association Lecture Tour: Throbbing Vitality (Jo Bong-am) and The Future is for *Minjung* (Bak Il-byeong),” *Donga Ilbo*, March 27, 1924; “New Youth Association Lectures in Incheon: Shake Off Doubts in the Trajectory (Sin Cheol), Who Can Possibly Cope With It? (Gim Chan), The Future is for *Minjung* (Bak Il-byeong), Great Significance of New Thought (Jo Bong-am), Women on Par (Jeong Jong-myeong), and Sufferings of Modern Women (Bae Hyeok-su),” *Donga Ilbo*, April 18, 1924; “Gwangju Workers Association Holds Lectures on Issues of Socialist Thought: Peaceful Measures for Survival (Bak Ga-gyu), A Review of the Tenants’ Movement (Song Bong-u), The Two Sides of Capital (Seol Byeong-ho), Modern Economic Organization and Women’s Liberation (Jeong Jong-myeong), and The Future is for *Minjung* (Bak Il-byeong),” *Donga Ilbo*, August 18, 1924; and “Lectures on Thought: As a Soldier for the Masses in Cheolweon for 2 Days in the Near Future, Seek an Egalitarian World (Jo Bong-am), World Trends, and The Future for *Minjung* (Gim Han-gyeong),” *Donga ilbo*, February 7, 1925.

²³ Yeom Sang-seop, “Korea and Literary Art, Literary Art and *Minjung*, Parts 1-7,” *Donga Ilbo*, April 10-17, 1928; and Yeom Sang-seop, “Fiction and *Minjung*, General Remarks on ‘Korea and Literary Art, Literary Art and *Minjung*,’ Parts 1-7,” *Donga Ilbo*, May 27-June 3, 1928.

²⁴ Gim Yun-u, “*Minjung* and Cinema, Parts 1-3,” *Donga Ilbo*, November 19-21, 1929.

In 1930, a series of 5 essays titled “Film Director Implores the Masses” appeared in the newspaper,²⁵ and “Thoughts on Making Proletarian Poetry a Mass Culture” came out in 4 installments in the same year.²⁶ In 1935, “The Prospective World War and Economic Life of the Masses” was released in 3 parts.²⁷ Both “*Minjung* and Cinema” in 1929 and the 1930 “Film Director Implores the Masses” indicate the important role accorded to cinema in regard to culture and national education at that time.

As examined above, “*minjung*” and “mass(es)” frequently appeared in newspaper articles and lectures by Korean intellectuals in the colonial period of the 1920s and 1930s, hinting at the fact that the two concepts were vying for the status of focal concept of social movements. Except for newspaper article series, the concepts of “*minjung*” and “mass(es)” disclosed no clear differences in sole-form use. Among expressions used in the early 1920s were “the *minjung*’s power” and “intelligent masses.” In 1925, a petition, “*Minjung* Should Appreciate the Arts”, was followed by an admonition, “The Masses Should Be Prudent.” Reports such as “Sports for *Minjung*” and “*Minjung* Sport, *Dongnae* Tug-of-War” (1938) appeared, as did “Sports for the Masses” (1938), “Unique Korean Sports Should Seek Modernization and Enjoyment by the Masses” (1939) or “Korean Archery to Become a Sport for the Masses” (1939). Here, “unique Korean sports” referred to games engaged in at national festivities, such as the tug of war or archery.

²⁵ Seo Gwang-je, “Cinema, Social Status and Responsibilities of Workers, Film Director Implores the Masses,” Parts 1-5, *Donga Ilbo*, February 24-March 2, 1930.

²⁶ Bak Wan-sik, “Thoughts on Making Proletarian Poetry a Mass Culture, Parts 1-4,” *Donga ilbo*, January 7-10, 1930.

²⁷ Bak Nam-su, “Vision for the New Era, Economy: The Prospective World War and Economic Life of the Mass, Parts 1-3,” *Donga Ilbo*, June 19-21, 1935.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted a quantitative analysis of the usage of four major concepts denoting collective subjects — “nation,” “people,” “*minjung*,” and “mass(es)” — with a view to compiling basic information needed for the development of research on the concept of “*minjung*” in the colonial period. In Section 1, based on a search and collation of *Donga Ilbo* article titles stored in the Korean History Database for the period 1920-1952, 757 cases for “nation,” 554 for “*minjung*,” 341 for “mass(es),” and 146 for “people” have been grouped and analyzed. By time period, “*minjung*” peaked in the 1920s, while “nation” made a rapid surge from the 1930s on. “People” was more notable in the early 1920s yet decreased rapidly from the mid-1920s on. “Mass(es)” was most popular around 1930.

Section 2 was devoted to an analysis of the respective usages of each concept. According to the manner in which they were used in *Donga Ilbo* titles, three main forms were distinguished: the compound-noun form, the modifier-concept form, and the sole form. The compound-noun form, which mainly represents stable and official usage, shows the most distinctive characteristics among the four concepts. Here usage of “Nation” was bipolarized, being employed for both domination and resistance, while “*Minjung*” tended to be associated with domestic social movements, namely the “enlightenment movement” and the “independence movement.” “Mass(es)” often related to the daily life of urban dwellers and the socialist movement, whereas “People” was seldom used in its compound-noun form.

Meanwhile, usages of the modifier-concept form and the sole form indicate some overlapping between the four concepts. In the modifier-concept form, “mass(es)” and “*minjung*” were distinct from each other in

their usages, being connected with the “class” framework and ethnicity respectively. However, to some extent both had in common the aspect of being agents of social movements; this tendency was more noticeable in their sole forms. This indicates that the two concepts competed with each other for dominance in usages for major issues (e.g. social enlightenment) in similar time periods.

In this paper, I have applied my own criteria and analytical approach to *Donga Ilbo* news titles published in the colonial period and have drawn several conclusions based on my analysis. Working on the concept of “*minjung*” within the framework of “collective subjects,” I presented some clues to understanding its various conjunctures and usages across different time periods and demonstrated its variant uses on official and non-official levels by employing a typology of forms.

My analysis in this paper, however, is limited as to its range of targets and depth. Needless to say, more in-depth analysis is necessary with a broader basis of data, in order to verify and strengthen my conclusions. It is my intention to resolve this problem with further research in the future.

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