

The Road to National Ruin, Censorship!
Review of *War and Censorship: Re-illuminating Ishikawa
Tatsuzō* [*Jeonjaeng gwa geomyeol: isikawa dasseujo
jaejomyeong*]

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I.

What if someone were to oversee the writing of this review? If its writer was put on trial and found guilty due to its content, what manner of work would he produce in the future? Would not it be full of sentences like this one? [REDACTED]? Or perhaps nothing but blank space? What kind of work would that be? Or knowing censorship might bring on his publisher's bankruptcy, what kind of an article might that writer produce?

Meanwhile, what would the publishers and editors—businessmen as well as intellectuals—do to protect the company from this fate? Sensing the watchful eye of the censorship authorities, would they not offer the author some form of “guidelines”? Would not the writer be induced into strenuous labor to avoid, by chance, any violation of the excessively abstract and arbitrary guidelines of the censorship authorities?

Would not there be contradictions with respect to the pursuit of commercial viability and that of conforming to censorship guidelines?

For that matter, what is left in a censored work, replete with omissions and redactions, to engage the reader? Fully aware of the operations of state censorship, publisher approval, and even the “self-censorship” of the author himself, how would the reader respond to such a work? Would not one be inspired to “read between the lines” to decipher the author’s original intent? In fact, would not writers, editors, and readers each endeavor to challenge the “prevailing taboos,” as stipulated by the censorship authorities, in any way they could?

It is in this respect that a written work’s adventure, as it passes from writer to publisher to reader, is quite remarkable. Of course, the “unseen helpers” decisively contributing to the production of a written work inevitably accompany censorship’s negative effects.

II.

Ishikawa Tatsuzō (1905-1985) wrote in a time characterized by strict censorship. The first recipient of the Akutagawa Prize and a pioneer in serialized novels published in newspapers, he was a modern Japanese writer perhaps best known for his “slips of the pen” in 1930s Japan, amid the Second Sino-Japanese War. It is Ishikawa Tatsuzō’s daring and controversial writings that are the subject of Kawahara Michiko’s book, *War and Censorship*.

When the Second Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937, Ishikawa Tatsuzō departed for China as a special correspondent for *Chūōkōron* (*Central Review*), a monthly literary magazine. He reported on soldiers stationed in Shanghai and Nanjing before returning to Japan to write the long-form novel, *The Living Soldiers* (*Ikite wiru heitai*). Intended for publication in the March 1938 edition of *Chūōkōron*, this novel vividly described life among a military unit as it moved from the North of China toward Nanjing. The unit was composed of recruits who had been

teachers, Buddhist monks, and doctors. Ishikawa described how they succumbed to mental and physical breakdown amid battlefield training. He also reported on depraved and incompetent behavior among them, relating scenes of pillaging, femicide, “comfort stations,” mental derangement, friendly fire, and so on.

Knowing that such a novel would fail to comply with censorship authorities, the *Chūōkōron* editors opted to redact and remove many of the book’s contents themselves. Nevertheless, the Home Ministry prohibited the book’s publication. In fact, Ishikawa and the *Chūōkōron* publishers and editors were charged with “disturbing the peace,” in violation of the “Newspaper Law,” and were eventually found guilty and sentenced in the courts.

III.

Kawahara Michiko, who has also been a journalist, reveals that he began work on his book in the aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, wherein he encountered a trend in “self-censorship” among Japanese journalists. His sense of identity as a journalist undoubtedly affected his uncovering and analysis of Ishikawa’s struggle with censorship. Kawahara met with Ishikawa’s eldest son, Ishikawa Sakae, whereby he procured and publicized documents related to Ishikawa’s trial record, journal, and testimony, as well as the Newspaper Law and other unpublished documents. He was also able to deeply explore Ishikawa’s suffering.

It is this aspect of Kawahara’s account that is particularly significant. Ordinarily, research pertaining to censorship is limited to analyzing censorship guidelines or inferring instances of censorship via documentary evidence. Kawahara’s work transcends these limitations with reference to materials allowing the reader to attain a sense of the thoughts, feelings, and reaction Ishikawa had with regard to his encounter with censorship.

IV.

Another important aspect of Kawahara's book pertains to the manner in which censorship, ironically, is revealed to undermine itself. In a time of war, the Japanese state prohibited, regulated, and concealed a vast array of information related to the war in the name of protecting "military secrets." Information with respect to rural impoverishment, national financial ruin, war crimes, and lost battles was also censored based on the fear that it might disturb the "peace." The Japanese people were thus mobilized to participate in a war they knew very little about. But did the state successfully cover the eyes and ears of the people? And did this effort truly serve to strengthen their patriotism?

The contradictions and irrationalities generated by the war would not go unnoticed by policing words and letters alone. Above all else, the disparity between what was said and what was perceived deepened in this censored reality. Censoring the truths conveyed in Ishikawa Tatsuzō's novel, tantamount to a war correspondent's report, rather served to sow doubt and suspicion throughout Japanese society. Absurd rumors spread like wildfire, exacerbating misgivings regarding what the war was truly about.

In addition, soldiers returning from the field were shocked to learn the degree to which information regarding the war was being covered up at home. The "casual manner" of the average citizen, in contrast with bleak scenes of battle crowded with dead, aroused an uncanny rage in these soldiers. Considering these conditions, Ishikawa Tatsuzō stated at his trial: "When Nanjing fell, I could not but take part in the festive atmosphere of the lantern procession. But I also desired to see the frontline because I believed I had to convey to the people the truth of this war." Ishikawa thus wrote his novel describing the horrors of the war in an effort to reduce the cognitive disparity between the homeland and the frontline. However, the state that habitually employed censorship and concealment bluntly denied his "earnest patriotism." Above all else,

Ishikawa was dismayed to be condemned as unpatriotic by the state.

V.

Why did Japan suffer defeat in the Pacific War? Why did it relentlessly march down the road to ruin? Many researchers in the field of “Japanese Studies” have preoccupied themselves with these questions. It was the wartime policy of the Japanese state to mobilize, control, and censor countless literary and media figures under the banner of a “patriotic press.” This was a Japanese state in which words and writing were converted into propaganda en masse. It is an ironic story, but amid the production of such propaganda society came to be characterized only by greater opacity, distrust, and rumors. Would it be an exaggeration to claim that censorship of the free human spirit caused the state and society to wither away and embark on the road to ruin?

VI.

Unfortunately, this was not a scenario limited to wartime Japan. Following Japan’s defeat, though expected to grant unconditional and unrestricted freedoms, the “liberal” US occupying forces quickly took up the reins of censorship. In fact, censorship was then conducted through methods even more elaborate and cunning, with all evidence of redaction and erasure removed before publication.

What can be said of censorship today? Revelations regarding blacklists and antiquated rhetoric used for cultural control at the very heart of 21st century Korea have shocked the Korean people. There are those that stubbornly deny the power of free expression to enrich and empower the nation. There are also those who voluntarily “surrender” to such conditions, asserting the need to adjust to “censorship guidelines” defining commercial viability in the publishing and broadcasting marketplaces.

Kawahara Michiko's *War and Censorship* is a study of events unfolding under the extreme conditions characterizing wartime as much as it is a simple and honest portrayal of Ishikawa Tatsuzō's misfortune. And without a doubt, it is a work revealing censorship's capacity to engender self-regulation and the ruin of society and the state.