

OVERTURNED

2024-020-FB-UA

Political Korean poem

A user appealed Meta's decision to remove an image on Facebook of a Korean poem called "The Scream of General Hong Beom-Do" written by Lee Dong Soon. After the Board brought the appeal to Meta's attention, the company reversed its original decision and restored the post.

Policies and topics

- 📄 Art/Writing/Poetry, Freedom of expression, Politics
- 🗨️ Hate speech

Region and countries

- 🌐 Asia Pacific and Oceania
- 📍 Japan, South Korea

Platform

- 📘 Facebook

This is a summary decision. Summary decisions examine cases in which Meta has reversed its original decision on a piece of content after the Board brought it to the company's attention and include information about Meta's acknowledged errors. They are approved by a Board member panel, rather than the full Board, do not involve public comments and do not have precedential value for the Board. Summary decisions directly bring about changes to Meta's decisions, providing transparency on these corrections, while identifying where Meta could improve its enforcement.

Case summary

A user appealed Meta's decision to remove an image on Facebook of a Korean poem called "The Scream of General Hong Beom-Do" written by Lee Dong Soon. After the Board brought the appeal to Meta's attention, the company reversed its original decision and restored the post.

Case description and background

In September 2023, a Facebook user posted an image of a Korean poem entitled "The Scream of General Hong Beom-Do" by Lee Dong Soon, which criticises an attempt by the authorities to relocate the bust of the general. The poem artistically expresses Hong Beom-Do's sentiment on the proposed relocation of his bust, and it includes the term "wae-nom" (왜놈), which literally translates as "person from Japan". However, it was historically used by Koreans as a general term to refer to Japanese invaders during the Japanese occupation of Korea. Over the years since, it has been frequently employed as an offensive, derogatory term meaning "Japanese bastards" or bad people. The post was viewed less than 500 times.

Hong Beom-Do was a prominent figure in early-20th-century Korea while the region was under the rule of Japan. He was an activist and general who led the Korean Independence Army to several notable victories in battles against Japanese forces. The user posted this content during a period of intensifying ideological conflict among politicians regarding a proposal to relocate the bust of the general from the Korean

[Military Academy](#) because of his past involvement with Soviet communist forces. The Defense Ministry's rationale for relocating his bust has faced significant public pushback.

Lee Dong Soon also posted the poem on Facebook, but it was removed by [Meta for violating its Hate Speech policy](#), a move that caused controversy. After the poem was taken down, users began a movement to share the poem more widely on Facebook.

Meta initially removed the user's post from Facebook under its [Hate Speech Community Standard](#), for content that targets "a person or group of people [based on their] protected characteristic(s) [through] cursing". The policy defines cursing as "profane terms or phrases ... with the intent to insult".

After the Board brought this case to Meta's attention, the company determined that the term "wae-nom" in this poem was not employed as a curse word, but rather as a description of Japanese soldiers as invaders. Therefore, the content did not violate the Hate Speech Community Standard and its removal was incorrect. The company then restored the content to Facebook.

Board authority and scope

The Board has authority to review Meta's decision following an appeal from the user whose content was removed (Charter Article 2, Section 1; Bylaws Article 3, Section 1).

When Meta acknowledges that it made an error and reverses its decision on a case under consideration for Board review, the Board may select that case for a summary decision (Bylaws Article 2, Section 2.1.3). The Board reviews the original decision to increase understanding of the content moderation process, reduce errors and increase fairness for Facebook and Instagram users.

Case significance

This case illustrates the challenges faced by Meta in enforcing its Hate Speech policy, particularly when dealing with artistic expression and historical references.

This case bears similarities to a prior decision, the Russian Poem case, in which the Board overturned Meta's initial decision to remove a post under its Hate Speech policy that insulted Russians and compared the Russian army invading Ukraine to Nazis. In this decision, the Board noted that failure during content moderation at-scale to consider the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine hindered users' abilities to express views on public interest issues. The Board has also observed in multiple cases, such as in the [Reclaiming Arabic Words](#) and [Praise Be to God](#) decisions, that problems of cultural and linguistic misunderstanding can lead to improper enforcement of Meta's policies.

The Board has issued recommendations to improve enforcement of Meta's Hate Speech policy with relevant cultural context. In a previous decision, the Board asked Meta to "conduct accuracy assessments focused on Hate Speech policy allowances that cover artistic expression and about human rights violations (e.g. condemnation, awareness raising)", ([Wampum Belt](#), recommendation no. 3). Meta implemented this recommendation, as demonstrated through published information.

The Board believes that full implementation of these recommendations could contribute to decreasing the number of enforcement errors under the Hate Speech policy. These errors are frequently connected to the lack of nuance, context and culturally specific linguistic analyses.

Decision

The Board overturns Meta's original decision to remove the content. The Board acknowledges Meta's correction of its initial error once the Board brought the case to Meta's attention.