

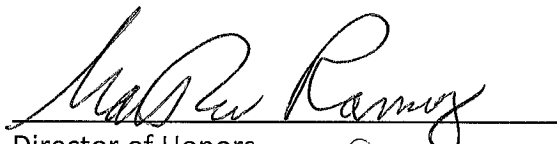
The Gwangju Uprising: A Movement, A Memory, A Myth of Modern South Korea

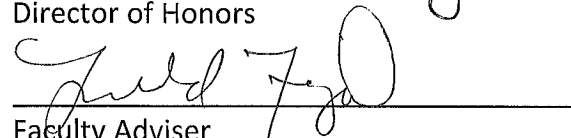
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On the basis of this thesis defended by the candidate on 4/25/12  
we, the undersigned, recommend that the candidate be awarded honors  
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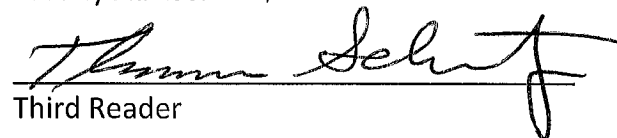
  
Third Reader



Table of Contents

|                            |    |
|----------------------------|----|
| I. Timeline 1945-1998----- | i  |
| II. Introduction-----      | 1  |
| III. Chapter One-----      | 6  |
| IV. Chapter Two -----      | 18 |
| V. Chapter Three -----     | 30 |
| VI. Chapter Four -----     | 46 |
| VII. Conclusion -----      | 61 |

## Timeline of Major Historical Events in South Korea 1945-1998

- 1945 End of WWII. US Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) established
- 1948 Syngman Rhee becomes the first president of the First Republic of Korea
- 1950 North Korea invades South Korea, beginning of the Korean War
- 1953 Armistice signed on the Korean War
- 1960 April Revolution. Syngman Rhee steps down as a result of the student uprising  
Second Republic established
- 1961 Park Chung-Hee and his group of military officers stage a coup d'état  
Third Republic established, with Park Chung-Hee as the president
- 1972 Park Chung-Hee passes the Yushin Constitution and establishes the Fourth Republic
- 1979 Assassination of Park Chung-Hee
- 1980 The Gwangju Uprising
- 1981 Fifth Republic is established by the military leader Chun Doo-Hwan
- 1987 Chun Doo-Hwan allows free election, Roh Tae-Woo wins election
- 1988 Seoul Olympics, end of Chun Doo-Hwan's term and the beginning of the Sixth Republic
- 1993 Kim Young-Sam becomes the second president of the Sixth Republic
- 1995 Chun Doo-Hwan and Roh Tae-Woo are put on trial for their roles in the Gwangju Uprising
- 1998 Kim Dae-Jung is elected president

## Introduction

In a study of the history of a memory of an event, the research aims to distinguish the different versions of an event being communicated by various actors for influence in the public at a specific time and place for a specific audience. The Gwangju Democratization Movement of May 18, 1980, is a traumatic event in the history of South Korea during which a demonstration for democracy against military law turned into a bloody confrontation between the citizens and the military in the city of Gwangju. In the three decades that followed, the memory of the uprising moved from one of local experience shared by those living in the southwestern region of South Korea into a national memory with an official recognition and its incorporation into the narrative of the national identity. Today, the Gwangju Uprising is synonymous with justice and democracy in the South Korean society, while in the 1980s it was considered a dangerous riot caused by gangs and communists. The evolution of the memory of Gwangju Uprising can be tracked through the subsequent student demonstration for democracy, in movies, television series, and other forms of popular culture as well as in the media and politics as it became an important topic for the newly democratized nation.

The goal of the thesis is to provide careful analyses of three different periods in the South Korean history during which the memory of the Gwangju Democratization Movement in May 18, 1980, became a topic of national interest and how each case is reflective of the development of a democratic nation and the simultaneous instillation of democratic values in national identity. The trauma and injustice found in the history and memory of the Gwangju Uprising provided fitting elements that proved to be instrumental for the groups and individuals discussed in each of the three cases. The memory of Gwangju was not only relevant for the students in 1987 demonstrating for democracy in Seoul, it became a symbol of democratic values and a reminder

of South Korea's past political turmoil. Each actor in the three instances revived the story of the Gwangju Uprising by focusing on the details most strategic and adaptable to their goals. The different methods of revival as well as the different tone of the retellings can reveal how the memory of Gwangju was being shaped, understood, and internalized by the public audience.

The first chapter of the thesis is a discussion of the historical background of the Gwangju Uprising that will lead into an explanation of the detailed outline of the event itself. It is important to understand that the democratization movement which came into being in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was a reaction to the complex and rapid political upheavals that dominated the history of the Korean peninsula beginning with the Japanese occupation, followed by WWII, the Korean War, and the Cold War. The government and the citizens of South Korea experienced decades of political instability in the aftermath of the Korean War while the country rapidly developed into an industrial nation under the supervision of the United States during this period. Economy and democracy were two conflicting priorities, and the dictatorial regimes overseen by the United States from 1950s to 1987 effectively stunted the growth of the development of democratic governance in an aggressive pursuit of economic prosperity. The Korean per capita income in 1961 was in the range of \$80-\$100, but by 1989 the figure reached over \$4,000.<sup>1</sup>

Along with the economic development during this period, another significant change was taking place simultaneously as the population moved into cities, leaving their rural towns and agricultural vocations behind. The second chapter of the thesis will highlight the impact of urbanization and economic development in the nature of the second student uprising in 1987 and how the radical changes in society also affected the way the society understood the Gwangju Uprising. Urbanization of South Korea is important in that it led to a greater emphasis on public education. The number of university students increased from 195,000 in 1971 to 1,242,000 in

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<sup>1</sup> Manwoo Lee, *The Odyssey of Korean Democracy: Korean Politics, 1987-1990* (Praeger Publishers: NY, 1990), 2.

1986, and the marked increase of educated citizens played a significant role in the democratization of South Korea.<sup>2</sup> The college students in 1980 initiated the Gwangju Democratization Movement at Chonam University, and college students gathered again in 1987 in Seoul to protest for democratic elections as well as an official reconciliation of the Gwangju Uprising. Through their demonstrations, the students presented the memory of Gwangju Uprising side by side with the establishment of a true democratic government in South Korea, accentuating the significance of the Gwangju Uprising for instilling their current democratic values.

The third chapter of the thesis is a study of how the Gwangju Uprising became a political instrument for President Kim Young Sam, his party, and his administration. In 1996, politicians had to appeal to the Seoul college students as they were believed to be the decisive factor in determining the outcome of the congressional election. In order to reinvent a more favorable image, the ruling party distanced itself from the past leaders who were responsible for the massacre in Gwangju, and thus, his period marks the most active era in terms of the commemoration and reconciliation of Gwangju Uprising. Although President Kim Dae Jung furthered the efforts to honor the victims of Gwangju Uprising and reinforced the significance of the Gwangju Democratization Movement in South Korean history of democratization, many of the important programs such as the reparation act, the official establishment of the May 18 Memorial Foundation in Gwangju, and the appointment of a National May 18 Cemetery were already initiated during Kim Young Sam administration. The political motivations pressed the movement of official commemorative practices during Kim Young Sam's presidency, and the political climate during his term provided the sole impetus for such drastic changes.

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<sup>2</sup> Lee, *The Odyssey of Korean Democracy*, 2.

The fourth chapter is an evaluation of the most prominent versions of the memory of Gwangju that are competing for wider acceptance in Korean society today. The government's attitude in its treatment of the Gwangju Uprising changed when a former student leader in Gwangju became the president of South Korea. The commemorative attitude of the Kim Dae Jung administration toward May 18<sup>th</sup> is a noticeable shift from Kim Young Sam administration's treatment of the Gwangju Uprising. Kim Dae Jung made sure that the individuals who had made significant contributions during the uprising were officially recognized, and he also made genuine efforts to instill the meaning and significance of the uprising within the context of South Korean history of democratization. By the time he took office, the public had already accepted and internalized the memory of Gwangju Democratization Movement as a seamless part of the national tradition and history. Thus, it seemed as though May 18 was no longer a regional memory fighting to win public recognition and a place in textbooks, but rather a widely accepted story about a rough starting point of South Korean democratization movement. The latter half of this chapter deals with the ongoing debate on the plans of the Department of Education to delete contents concerning May 18 Democratization Movement. The current administration's tacit support of the deletion of this particular portion of modern Korean history is rather startling, and the reason behind the government's support is no less confusing. In observing and comparing the differences between Kim Dae Jung and the current administration's perspectives of the Gwangju Uprising, the different textures of the memory of Gwangju Uprising become vivid.

In Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, one finds an examination of the history and concept of nationalism and the subsequent formation of an imagined community among those who consider themselves as belonging to one nation. Anderson's chapter entitled 'Memory and Forgetting' brings up an



interesting notion that the rise of the awareness of a community renders such unit to form a narrative of identity.<sup>3</sup> The thesis aims to demonstrate through the three cases how the different aspects of the memory of the Gwangju Uprising were modified and retold by different actors at different times, and how the 31 years of remembrance have created a complex, layered memory of the one important moment in South Korean history. Through the examination of the various crucial moments at which the Gwangju memory reemerged, we can gain an important insight of not only the South Korean democratization process but also put into perspective the complicated details of South Korean politics as exists today.

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<sup>3</sup> Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 206.

## Chapter 1: Fomenting an Uprising

It is difficult to visualize South Korea as the war-torn, financially dependent nation it once was by the time the armistice paused the Korean War in 1953. South Korea has undergone an impressive economic development since the peninsula's division into two separate nations, and today South Korea is the home of major global corporations such as Samsung, LG, and Hyundai. The city of Seoul, which once was a battleground during the Korean War, is a booming capital decorated with skyscrapers and serves as the nation's center of commerce, education, and politics. The Cheongwadae, or the presidential Blue House which is also located in Seoul, is not only a preservation of a historical site which once served as royal garden but also represents a robust, free democratic governance that takes place underneath the blue tile-roof. South Korean political history since 1953 is a complex story of six republics, coups, assassinations, and large-scale riots. Yet, South Korea managed to fortify a democratic system of government by 1987 which came to full fruition by the mid-1990s.

The first portion of this chapter will examine the history of regime changes as well as the progress of nation building as supported by the US from the period after the Korean War in 1953 up to the Gwangju Uprising on May 18, 1980. While the immediate background of the Gwangju Uprising is the assassination of President Park Chung-Hee on October 26, 1979, the whirlwind of economic, political, and institutional development that had taken place over the course of nearly three decades set the stage for the Gwangju Uprising in critical ways. The second part of the chapter is a detailed account of the Gwangju Uprising. Transpiring at the end of an era of rapid industrialization, the Gwangju Uprising is a narrative of a violent clash between the military regime and the educated citizens in which the protesters of the uprising are ultimately put down by the military. This first chapter is not only an account of the Gwangju Uprising on May 18,

1980. It is more importantly an explanation of how this violent confrontation which nearly reached the status of a civil war was fomented by the rapid social changes such as industrialization that had transformed the country and its people. The movement for democratic reform had gained significant momentum at this moment in 1980 mainly fueled by the activist leaders, political dissidents, and university students. The Gwangju Uprising is in a way a testament of the positive transformation that swept over the nation in a matter of less than two decades as well as a progress report of the political leadership of military dictator Park Chung Hee.

#### *History of Korean Politics Post-Korean War*

Historian Gregg Brazinsky argues in his work, *Nation Building in South Korea*, that the political evolution in South Korea was a result of a combination of two forces – the US’s nation building efforts and the Korean agency throughout the process. Even considering the amount and longevity of US aid in South Korea, Brazinsky argues that the ‘Korean agency was the most crucial factor in shaping the country’s transformation.’<sup>4</sup> The US provided tremendous military and financial assistance to South Korea during this period as the country was ‘deeply troubled’ and the US saw the success or failure of South Korea directly translated into US victory or loss in Cold War. For example, as one of the “big five” countries receiving support from the US during the Kennedy administration, South Korea received \$380 million in aid in 1960.<sup>5</sup> Nation building from 1961 to 1979 during which Park Chung-Hee led the nation under his military rule was predominantly focused on industrialization. The Gwangju Uprising can be seen as a pivotal moment in which the definition of South Korean nation building was expanded to also include democratic political reform.

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<sup>4</sup> Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy*, 3.

The very first Republic of Korea was established in 1948 by Rhee Syng-Man, whose regime heavily prioritized South Korean national security over democracy or economic development for the duration of the First Republic. Under Rhee's rule, South Korea was very much dependent on US assistance as Rhee was opposed to export economy, and the government held a monopoly on all the imported American goods which further reinforced a closed economic system.<sup>6</sup> Although the state's military was a crucial asset in combating threats to the nation's stability and authority, the regime increasingly blurred the lines between 'armed challengers' and 'political opponents'.<sup>7</sup> Brazinsky notes, "By 1960, though the threat of Communist aggression had subsided somewhat, most South Koreans were neither significantly more prosperous nor freer than when their state was first created."<sup>8</sup>

After suffering from twelve years of Rhee's autocratic rule, the students staged a revolution in April of 1960 which effectively forced Rhee to resign from office. The students formed a democratic government and established the Second Republic; unfortunately, the institution came to an end with the rise of the military junta on May 16, 1961. Park Chung Hee and his circle of military officials had been planning on this coup d'état since the April Revolution. The overthrow of the Second Republic took place swiftly and progressed virtually unopposed by the rest of the military leaders who were not a part of Park's plan. The new regime promised the nation to protect the nation from Communist infiltration, observe all international agreements, improve the nation's economy, and eventually terminate itself so that a new government can take its place after its goals for South Korea has been accomplished.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Brazinsky, *Nation Building*, 38.

<sup>7</sup> Brazinsky, *Nation Building*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Brazinsky, *Nation Building*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Brazinsky, *Nation Building*, 116.

Park Chung Hee had lofty goals for the nation, and as the sole ruler of the Third Republic and Fourth Republic he was determined to build South Korea into a modern nation with a strong industry and economy.<sup>10</sup> While Rhee Syng-Man kept South Korean economy relatively weak and financially dependent on US support, Park Chung Hee envisioned a modernized, industrialized nation that emphasized exporting products rather than surviving on imported goods. Park's main development strategy was to create industries that would produce for the export market. In order to catch up to the rest of the industrialized world, Park actively looked up to the US as a model for industrialization.<sup>11</sup> For example, one of the most successful examples of Park's government-funded industrialization projects is the Pohang Iron and Steel Company located on the southeast harbor of Korea. Built in 1973, the steel mill was larger than any found in the US and technologically comparable to those in Japan. By 1981, the capacity of the steel mill reached 8.5 million metric tons per year.<sup>12</sup> Park also expanded the list of exportable goods which included textiles, electronics, plywood, and ships, which in turn raised the nation's annual export rate by a remarkable 40% during the Third and Fourth Republic.<sup>13</sup>

Historian Harold C. Hinton reasons that this 'rapid developmental surge' was the main contributor of political instabilities of Park's regime. Park's economic policies, both domestic and foreign, transformed the largely agricultural society that had been devastated by two destructive wars into an industrialized society in a matter of eighteen years. His mantra throughout his presidential career had been, "*Chal sara bo se*" or "Let us prosper (like the others)", and the tune composed to his famous signature phrase is synonymous with '60s and '70s

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<sup>10</sup> The Fourth Republic of Korea (1972-1981) was initiated under Park Chung-Hee as a replacement of the Third Republic (1961-1972). The Yushin Constitution was passed to restrict freedoms and quiet the voices of political opposition, and the martial law was enacted under this constitution. The constitution of the Fourth Republic significantly increased Park's authority as a president.

<sup>11</sup> Harold C. Hinton, *Korea Under New Leadership: The Fifth Republic* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983), 41.

<sup>12</sup> Hinton, *Korea Under New Leadership*, 42.

<sup>13</sup> Hinton, *Korea Under New Leadership*, 42.

in South Korean culture today. In his speeches President Park frequently posed the question, “Why shouldn’t we live and prosper like the rest of them?”<sup>14</sup> His sole focus was on economic prosperity through industrialization, and political reform or movement toward democracy had no room on his agenda. In fact, Park declared martial law and later the Yushin Constitution in 1972 in order to achieve a more streamlined decision-making process. In effect, the Yushin Constitution gave Park the power over the legislature and the judiciary branches of government in addition to the executive branch, and it ensured that Park could be re-elected for an unlimited number of terms.<sup>15</sup> While the majority of citizens benefited from the rising GNP and modernization of South Korea during his dictatorship, the educated members of society increasingly took issue with Park’s relentless and authoritarian stance against any political voice that ran contrary to his.

### *The May 18<sup>th</sup> Democratic Uprising*

On October 26, 1979, President Park Chung-Hee, his chief bodyguard Cha Ji-Cheol, and the chief of Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) Kim Jae-Gyu were having a serious conversation over dinner. The southeastern cities of Busan and Masan were leading popular protests against the government and President Park’s dictatorial rule, asking that the president step down and end the oppressive grip the government had on the freedom of its citizens. During the dinner, Kim shot both Cha and President Park, which brought an end to the Fourth Republic of Korea and heralded in the Fifth Republic. Although the Prime Minister Choi Gyu-Ha became the president immediately following Park’s assassination in October, the country experienced a period of uncertainty and political instability from the power vacuum left by the sudden end of Park’s eighteen-year regime. Park’s Yushin Constitution, which banned political activities,

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<sup>14</sup> “President Park Chung-Hee’s ‘Chal sara bo seh’ in 1966.” Video retrieved from <http://goo.gl/gBKQx>.

<sup>15</sup> Hyung-A Kim, *Korea’s Development Under Park Chung Hee: Rapid Industrialization, 1961-79* (New York, NY: Routledge Curzon, 2004), 140.

censored the media, and allowed him to exercise his military power over the citizens to deter protests and riots, was continued in spirit by General Chun Doo-Hwan, successfully thwarting the hopes of pro-democracy dissidents and citizen protesters for a change in the government order. Chun staged a military coup in December 12, 1979, after gaining power and support from the military. People, especially students, did not lose their momentum right away following Chun's coup, however. They believed that the uncertainties created by the power vacuum provided them an opportune moment to push for democracy with more vigor than ever. This period is known as "Spring of Seoul", during which university students and professors sought to organize in ways that were hitherto difficult under the Yushin Constitution and continued their plans to campaign for democracy through future protests and strengthened student organizations. The students' growing momentum for movements toward political reform in spring of 1980 also coincided with Chun's appointment as the head of the KCIA in April and the consequent growth of his power over Korean politics. The students were yet unaware of Chun's intentions and his position in the tense debate between supporters of Yushin order and pro-democratic reformists when students across the country rallied in the streets on May 14<sup>th</sup> to vocalize opposition against the martial law which was freshly put into effect since October, 1979. In Gwangju, students gathered at Chonnam National University on May 14<sup>th</sup> to support the national democratization movement. By May 15<sup>th</sup>, 100,000 protesters rallied in the streets of Seoul but student leaders decided that the massive scale could risk a messy confrontation with the military and decided to temporarily suspend Seoul protests thereafter. Students in Seoul would soon find out, however, that by this date, Chun had already set in motion an extensive deployment and strategic plan of putting down the uprising should it reoccur, as he moved Third Airborne Special Forces Brigade and the 20<sup>th</sup> Army Division into the capital by May, 15. In the south, the Gwangju protest did

not cease but only continued to grow, from 6,000 students on May, 14, to 30,000 by May, 16. The students believed that they had sent a clear message against the martial law and decided to presume that school can resume normally starting May, 17. However, in the morning of May, 17, military commanders and Chun decided to expand and enforce martial law nationally in reaction to the growing student protests across the country, which set in motion the imprisonment of hundreds of political dissidents by the end of the day. The imprisonment of Gwangju's protest leader, Kim Dae-Jung, and the fact that their protests had been in vain, prompted the Gwangju students to gather again on May, 18, at the university. In line with his treatment of Seoul, Chun dispatched 66 officers and 1,792 private soldiers to the Jeolla region, paying special attention to Gwangju by dispatching 2 airborne battalions of the 7<sup>th</sup> Special Forces brigade instead of following the usual pattern of one battalion per city.<sup>16</sup> Although the number of paratroopers in Gwangju was smaller than that dispatched to Seoul, Gwangju was still anticipated to be problematic because of the known size of the demonstrations that took place in the prior week. As mentioned earlier, students in Seoul decided to suspend protest activities when they realized the extent to which Chun was committed in thwarting all political activism using his military power, but students in Gwangju resumed their protest at approximately 9:30 A.M. on May 18<sup>th</sup> beginning at the Chonnam National University and marching into the streets of downtown Gwangju. Until about noon of May, 18, the main targets of the tear bombs and other physical collisions were the student demonstrators. However, other Gwangju citizens who happened to be nearby the students in the streets also became targets of the violent suppression which soon proved to be an indiscriminate attack on all citizens of Gwangju. By May, 19, 3

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<sup>16</sup> 'Operation Journal of the Loyalist Army during the Gwangju Democratic Uprising', *Voice of People*, on August, 1988. 12-26. 'Operation Report of the Martial Law Forces during the Gwangju Democratic Uprising', *Monthly Chosun* on September, 1988. 658-671. Reprinted in 'Military Operations in the Gwangju Democratic Uprising' by Jung Hae-Gu from *History of 518 Democratic Uprising, I* (Gwangju: The May 18 Memorial Foundation, 2001) 276-277.



more battalions from 11<sup>th</sup> Special Forces Brigade were dispatched to Gwangju, which intensified the brutalities of the protest suppression. Due to the expansion of paratrooper units deployed at Gwangju, the violent military suppression now reached beyond just the downtown area and universities of Gwangju to the entire city as they continued their indiscriminate attacks on all civilians in their view, which led to a significant increase in fatalities. It is also reported that on this day the paratroopers also began to use sabers rather than just batons. The intention of the military leaders, and especially Chun, was to completely uproot all resistance born out of Gwangju so that they would not have to deal with the kind of regional protests that Park had faced before his assassination. The paratroopers, who were specially trained to combat North Korean infiltration, were used as an extra measure to ensure that the protest is successfully thwarted in Gwangju. However, such an extremist plan somewhat backfired on the military authorities and Chun as the brutalities of May 18-19 actually pushed the angry Gwangju citizens into the student demonstration against the military law which had sanctioned such violence in the first place.

Rather than retreating or hiding from the paratroopers, the citizens turned their anger into strength and armed themselves with pipes, tools, and other impromptu weapons and used a strategy of barricade using large vehicles available to them which they used to block traffic. Because this sudden turnaround in the riot suppression was so unexpected by the authorities, May 20-21 was more or less a victory for the defenders of the Gwangju Uprising in a sense that the people's square bars, steel pipes, and even bricks were more effective compared to the batons of the paratroopers, and the citizens' barricades proved to be so effective that even with additional airborne battalions dispatched to Gwangju for reinforcement, the paratroopers were eventually forced into a defensive position. By the evening of 20<sup>th</sup> the paratroopers resorted to

open fire at the citizens, and on 21<sup>st</sup> around 1 P.M. the paratroopers volleyed shots at the crowd of citizens they confronted at the provincial office which killed at least 54 and injured 500.<sup>17</sup> Just as the extreme measures of the military authorities to completely suppress and uproot the protest had the undesired and unforeseen effect of intensifying the citizens' involvement in the demonstration at the beginning of the uprising, this instance of firing shots into the civilian crowd on May, 21, pushed the civilians to seize armories at nearby regions with carbines, M-1s, and TNT. The military troops found themselves withdrawing forces from strategic points of Gwangju, further confused by the replacement of the military leader in charge in order to implement harsher suppression. The troops withdrew from Gwangju by 4 o'clock in the afternoon of 22<sup>nd</sup> in order to reorganize under the new leadership and to return with an operation more brutal and more certain to achieve a total suppression of the city of Gwangju.

The goal of the military now was to first prevent the rioters from mobilizing out from downtown to other parts of Gwangju, which would only increase the number of demonstrators and spread the areas of conflict. In order to do so, the military would blockade the zone where the armed citizens were concentrated. As of the first volley of fire in the afternoon on 21<sup>st</sup>, the military was on the self-defense stance and therefore opened fire on anyone they encountered. During the road blockades, the paratroopers set fire on the roadsides which indiscriminately harmed nonrioters and rioters alike who were on the roads. The troops also opened fire on the passing buses on the highway which either killed the passengers directly, or else the converging fire from the damaged vehicles would often take the lives of those who survived the shots. Even when the passengers would plead for them to stop firing, the brigades refuse to stop shooting at the civilians.<sup>18</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> brigade, which was in charge of blocking and suppressing people they

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<sup>17</sup> Military Operation in Gwangju, 285.

<sup>18</sup> Military Operation in Gwangju, 290.

encountered in the roadways, also moved into nearby villages where they shot at houses and civilians at random, not excluding children.

From May 25-27, the military finalized the progress of suppression by implementing a 2-phase operation that would ultimately help them take over all the strategic targets in Gwangju. The military was pressed for time to take over and suppress Gwangju at this point because the longer the total suppression was delayed, the bigger the group of demonstration grew since Gwangju citizens continued to join in the struggle against martial law after the citizens' victory on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May. Thus, the military forces moved into Gwangju aggressively a minute past midnight on May 27<sup>th</sup>, hoping to take posts at the targets of the provincial office, tourist hotel, the park, and other locations where the civilian troops were stationed.<sup>19</sup> Although they were vastly outnumbered and lacked proper arms to defend themselves, the citizens were resolute to stand their grounds and fight for democracy. The materials such as flyers that were circulated during these latter days of Gwangju Uprising show that the Gwangju citizens demanded the 'resignation of interim government, withdrawal of martial law, open punishment of murderer Chun Doo-Hwan' and that they would 'fight to the end' for these demands to come true.<sup>20</sup> By May 27, 1980, the statements and manifestos released by Gwangju citizens, the Democratic Struggle Committee, and the Gwangju Citizen-Student Control Committee dub the paratroopers the 'gang' of Chun Doo-Hwan, or 'mob soldiers'.<sup>21</sup> The citizens and students of Gwangju were committing themselves to a cause that, as the violence of the uprising escalated, would require risking their lives as the military moved in to suppress them at all costs. The military operation

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<sup>19</sup> Military Operations in Gwangju, 293-294.

<sup>20</sup> All Citizens of Gwangju. 'To All Citizens of Gwangju.' on May 25, 1980 from 'Manifestoes, Statements and Newspapers on the Gwangju Democratic Uprising.' by Park Chan-Seung, *History of 518 Democratic Uprising I*, 394.

<sup>21</sup> Manifestoes, Statements, and Newspapers (Gwangju: The May 18 Memorial Foundation, 2001) 396-397.

proved to be successful, and by 6:25 A.M., the Gwangju Uprising came to a close and pronounced the suppressors as the victors by the end of the 10-day brutality.

Over the course of the ten days of the uprising, the Gwangju Democratization Movement developed into a city-wide rebellion against the military, but the uprising started out as a planned demonstration of a network of university students who were joining others nationwide in an effort to democratize the South Korean government. More specifically, the student movements aimed to bring an end, once and for all, to the enforcement of martial law which was frequently invoked under the Park Chung-Hee regime in order to suppress political activities.

#### *International Background and the Role of the US*

Although on the surface the Gwangju Uprising may appear to be a strictly internal conflict, a clash between the people and the government of South Korea, there were external factors that also influenced the procession and outcome of the uprising. The military troops of South Korea were not independent but rather part of the ROK-US Combined Forces Command, a remnant of the Korean War. The US acted as a supporter, provider, and mentor of South Korea in the post-war period and all throughout the Cold War that shaped out to be a patriarchic relationship. Although the US did not have direct control over the paratroopers that were dispatched to Gwangju over the course of the uprising, US officials in South Korea held some influence on Chun's actions as they agreed with the General that maintaining the country's law and order should take priority at this time.

Although the speculated role of the US over the course of the Gwangju massacre is viewed as a catalyst that led to the emergence of anti-American sentiments in South Korea at this time, the intentions of the US behind advising the Korean military authorities to secure stability of the nation rather than encouraging South Korean leaders to implement sweeping changes to

instill democracy can be better understood in the context of the political atmosphere of the Second Cold War. The first Cold War which began seemed to wane with the détente between the Soviet Union and US in the 1960s, but a new wave of revolutions in the 1970s effectively increased the tension between the two spheres of ideology, ushering in the era of what many scholars refer to as the Second Cold War. Politically unstable countries in Africa, Asia, and South America began to take sides with the Soviet Union from mid- to late-1970s, sending alarming signs of decrease in American hegemony. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 made an especially strong impact on the dynamics of the new Cold War and subsequently shaped the US outlook on its future actions concerning the hot zones of Cold War such as South Korea. The Shah government which had been supported strongly by the US was overthrown despite the Iranian military efforts to suppress the anti-government demonstrations, and after rendering the Shah government illegitimate, the Iranian masses replaced the old Shah monarchy with an Islamic Republic. The US had to shift gears in ideology to combat the loss of additional free world territory. By the time the Gwangju Uprising took place, the US official Ambassador Gleysteen had already communicated with Chun on matters of student demonstrations, and concluded that the US consented to Chun's use of military force in case of emergency situations caused by such destabilizing factors. In the perspective of the US during this specific era of the war, every measure that could ensure security against revolutionary movements in politically unstable regions of the world should be taken as the US could not afford to continue to lose strategic footholds.

## Chapter 2: The June Uprising of 1987

On September 1, 1980, Chun officially became the president of South Korea. By the end of the month, Chun enforced his newly revised constitution thus marking the beginning of the Fifth Republic. Chun's method of usurping power was seen as illegitimate, and the continuation of military rule ensured by his inauguration was a highly unwelcomed event for South Koreans who believed that the student demonstrations in early 1980 would lead to national democratic reforms. The most vocal and visible opposition to the regime were the growing numbers of students and political dissidents. These radical students and dissidents came together under the ideology called *sammin*, or 'three *min*'. The groups asserted that from the establishment of the First Republic of South Korea in 1948 up to the Fifth Republic, each government violated the principles of the *minjung*, *minjok*, and *minju*, or the people, the nation, and the democracy, respectively.<sup>22</sup> These protesters emphasized that the only way to save South Korea from the dictatorial regimes was to follow the *sammin* ideology.

Under Chun's regime, the nation witnessed radical changes taking shape in the society. Like the rulers before him, Chun's highest priority was economic development of the country and thus continued to lead the nation in an aggressive pursuit of industrialization. By 1987, about 8.8 million people were employed by about 1.7 million small businesses.<sup>23</sup> These were radical changes that swiftly turned the third world country into a developing nation with promising signs of recovery within a little over two decades. Alongside the economic developments, there were other discernable shifts in the society as well. Urbanization of the population accompanied the industrial movement as the country moved away from agricultural economy. The opportunities available at the factories in larger cities prompted people living in

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<sup>22</sup> Manwoo Lee, *The Odyssey of Korean Democracy: Korean Politics, 1987-1990* (New York: Praeger, 1990), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Lee, *The Odyssey of Korean Democracy: Korean Politics, 1987-1990*, 2.

the rural regions to move to urban settings. While 75 percent of the population lived in rural parts in the 1940s, nearly 70 percent of the population lived in cities by 1990.<sup>24</sup> Public education was another factor that led to drastic changes in the society, and it had a direct influence on the course of democratization movement. The emergence of the educated masses and a marked increase in the number of university students paved the way for the next round of democratic uprising.

The June Uprising in 1987 was a moment at which South Korean protesters evoked a sense of injustice among the citizens by bringing up the memory of the Gwangju Uprising. During the June Uprising of 1987, the demonstrators cited the Gwangju Uprising as an instance of Chun and the government's violation of the *sammin* ideology, and thereby highlighted the illegitimacy of Chun's regime. The task at hand was for the students, workers, and the opposition party to demonstrate in an effective way the illegitimacy of Chun Doo Hwan's government. While the Gwangju Democratization Movement on May 18, 1980, was an outcry of the South Korean citizens against military dictatorship and martial laws, the June Uprising was a demand for a new, democratic constitution. The Gwangju demonstration was meant to bring democratic reforms to replace martial laws which had banned political activism and enforced media censorship nationwide, but the purpose of the June Uprising was the establishment of a completely new constitution. In Gwangju, Chun acted swiftly to put an end to the protests with the military, and the violent confrontation between the troops and the Gwangju citizens set a tone for the upcoming regime. Under Chun's command and the enactment of the martial law, the military brutally suppressed the students and citizens in Gwangju and incurred heavy casualties. Chun's maneuvering of the student protest in Gwangju became a major stepping stone for him as he prepared to establish a military government. By May 31, 1980,

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<sup>24</sup> Lee, *The Odyssey of Korean Democracy: Korean Politics, 1987-1990*, 2.

Gwangju was a lost cause for democracy, and Chun had already set up a Special Committee for National Security Measures which effectively promoted him to the head of state and undermined the authority of the acting president Choi Kyu Ha.<sup>25</sup>

The June Uprising, on the other hand, was a well-organized movement targeting Seoul, the center of politics, but the network of leaders expanded the movement nation-wide to include ten additional, major cities. The June Uprising was not without its own share of violent confrontation of the police and the protesters as tear gas filled the streets over the course of the seventeen-day rally. The difference between the Gwangju Uprising and the June Uprising was that the protesters in 1987 used the prior memory of the turn of events at Gwangju in 1980 to their advantage. They referenced Gwangju as a clear evidence of the military government's blatant disregard of the laws and a violation of human rights; it also did not help the Chun regime that the violent suppression of Gwangju had eased Chun's road to the presidential Blue House as it sent a strong message of fear to his opponents at the time. It was easy to make connections back to Gwangju throughout the course of the June Uprising since Kim Dae Jung, one of the most prominent student activists who was detained in Gwangju in 1980, was now the leader of the Reunification Democratic Party. Although many of the Seoul demonstrators had little to no connection or allegiance to the southwest region of Korea or Gwangju, they knew the story of Kim Dae Jung, that he was imprisoned for involvement in Gwangju Uprising and subsequently banned from political activities until shortly before the June Uprising.

The Reunification Democratic Party was the driving force behind the organization called The National Coalition for the Democratic Constitution (NCDC) which became official on May

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<sup>25</sup> Choi Kyu Ha was the acting president since October, 1979, following the assassination of President Park Chung Hee on the same month.



27, 1987.<sup>26</sup> The organization was a coalition of people and resources among various groups in society that wanted the nation to adopt a new constitution, but the element of the NCDC that made it draw attention from the public was the involvement of the Reunification Democratic Party in all its activities. Other than the political party, the NCDC was comprised of students, journalists, religious leaders, and other political activists that had been looking for a proper outlet to address the issues of the Chun regime. Shortly after the NCDC was officially formed, the organization planned the June Uprising of 1987. The illegitimacy of Chun's Fifth Republic was the focal point of attack as the NCDC demanded that the government issue a new constitution and promptly hold free elections.

In addition to government reforms through a constitution reflective of democracy, the NCDC also wanted the current government to address its abuses of power in the past. In the *Donga Newspaper* article published on May 27, 1987, it states that '...additionally, [the NCDC] will advocate for the free debate of cases such as the Gwangju incident, various torture cases,' and acts of the government which the NCDC considered to be an unjust exercise of power.<sup>27</sup> The NCDC sent a clear message to the public and the Chun regime that they will organize rallies and demonstrations all across the nation to make sure that their grievances toward the government is fully addressed. The NCDC made public announcements informing people of the major demonstration they planned to hold on June 10<sup>th</sup> which was also day of the Democratic Justice Party's national convention. The convention of Chun's party was to take place at the Jamsil Stadium, also known as the Jamsil Olympic Stadium after 1988, and the main purpose of the convention was Chun's official appointment of Roh Tae Woo as the DJP's next presidential

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<sup>26</sup> "The Coalition of the Reunification Democratic Party and Opposition Party," on May 27, 1987. *Donga Newspaper*. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/cK5X7>. Translated by the author.

<sup>27</sup> "The Coalition of the Reunification Democratic Party and Opposition Party," on May 27, 1987. *Donga Newspaper*.

candidate. An article on June 2<sup>nd</sup> from the *Donga Newspaper* reported, “An unstable political atmosphere created by the anticipation of the June 10<sup>th</sup> power collision; [DJP] worries that the national convention will be ruined.”<sup>28</sup> The upcoming collision, as termed by *Donga*, created a sense of uneasy anticipation among South Koreans as they watched the two opposing political parties prepare for large-scale events with goals that directly conflicted with each other. The DJP, which was the ruling party, wanted to appoint Chun’s successor who will continue to carry the torch of the party in the Blue House while the opposing party was trying to overthrow the regime through massive, national demonstrations.

On the first day of the June Uprising, there were nearly 240,000 protesters gathered at 22 locations throughout the country, but this number escalated to 1.5 million people spread out over 33 cities by June 26<sup>th</sup>.<sup>29</sup> The police used teargas until they ran out, but the size of the rally and the number of participants was simply too overwhelming for the government to handle. The usual tactic of government propaganda via media was also losing efficacy – the educated masses were now skeptical of the government labeling and grouping all kinds of political dissidents and protesters as North Korean communists. However, the government still printed articles daily to influence the public and to frame the June Uprising as a dangerous movement that risks the survival of the nation for the sake of a mere ‘improvement’.<sup>30</sup> An article entitled “An Ominous Wind” on June 13 commented that “the universities’ radicalism may lead the nation into a complete catastrophe.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “Political Instability Ahead on June 10<sup>th</sup> from Power Competition,” on June 02, 1987. *Donga Newspaper*. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/RcDdt>. Translated by the author.

<sup>29</sup> Myung-sik Lee, *The History of Democratization Movement in Korea* (Seoul: Korean Democracy Foundation, 2010), 136-138.

<sup>30</sup> “An Ominous Wind,” on June 13, 1987. *Gyung-sang Newspaper*. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/62D1U>. Translated by the author.

<sup>31</sup> “An Ominous Wind,” on June 13, 1987. *Gyung-sang Newspaper*.

On the other hand, a *Donga* article on June 17 entitled “The Era for Forceful Suppression Has Passed” paints a different picture of the uprising. In the article, Kim Young Sam speaks on behalf of the RDP by emphasizing that President Chun himself needs to deal with the issues that his party and the NCDC is bringing up through these demonstrations. When asked for the purpose of the uprising, Kim Young Sam replied, “As we have stated numerous times before, we want a serious discussion with President Chun on implementing democratic reforms, and while we don’t mind meeting with his party chairman Roh Tae Woo, it is President Chun with whom we need to have a substantive dialogue as he is ultimately the one in charge.”<sup>32</sup> It is interesting that Kim Young Sam persistently emphasized throughout the article the importance of negotiating directly with Chun rather than Roh Tae Woo or any other representatives, as Chun is the most ‘responsible’ figure in establishing the current military government. Kim Young Sam also confessed, “I would not be surprised if Chun decided to pass resolutions in order to evade this current situation,” which reflects Chun’s habitual use and abuse of his authority over the military to deal with political opposition.<sup>33</sup> However, Kim Young Sam’s speculation of Chun’s possible course of action toward the June Uprising did not reveal signs of fear of brutal outcomes. This does not necessarily mean that the protesters were no longer afraid of Chun, especially when people were aware of the way the Gwangju Uprising turned out. Instead of the dying at the hands of Chun’s military, as was the case in Gwangju, some people began romanticizing the notion of martyrdom during the course of the Gwangju suppression and took it one step further by committing self-immolation in the name of democracy.

The US also kept an eye on the happenings of Korean politics as Chun’s reign was slowly coming to an end. On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, *The New York Times* also reported that Chun has chosen Roh Tae

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<sup>32</sup> “The Era for Forceful Suppression Has Passed,” on June 17, 1987. *Donga Newspaper*. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/j61x1>. Translated by the author.

<sup>33</sup> “The Era for Forceful Suppression has Passed,” on June 17, 1987. *Donga Newspaper*.

Woo as his successor, and that the Reunification Democratic Party was planning a demonstration on the very date scheduled for Roh's official nomination at the DJP national convention. The article featured a short statement by Kim Young Sam who quoted Lincoln in saying that South Korea needs 'a government of the people, by the people and for the people,' and the article also noted that 'police officials said they would prevent street protests'.<sup>34</sup> The world watched as the two parties raced each other to decide the future of South Korean polity on June 10<sup>th</sup>.

### *The June Uprising*

Members of the Minjung Party started to trickle into the newly built Jamsil Stadium around 8 a.m. on June 10, 1987. The Fourth National Convention of the Minjung Party was a highly anticipated and organized event, and the success of the convention was secured by President Chun's meticulous use of the police force which guarded the surrounding areas of Jamsil Stadium and Seoul at large. By 9 a.m., nearly 11,000 members and supporters of the Minjung Party had made their way through the densely secured streets leading to the stadium and were greeted by soft background music, festive, colorful fans decorating the seats, and large placards proudly representing the goals of the Minjung Party at the hall. One of the placards read, "We honor the governor, congratulate our nominee, and give hope to the people!" A sense of carefree celebration enveloped the whole event, as there would be no surprises involved in electing the next party nominee and successor to Chun Doo Hwan. The ballots were printed with only one name, Roh Tae Woo. The voting process took all of thirty minutes, after which the guests were treated to various entertainment acts overseen by the national broadcasting station MBC and included famous pop singers of the day such as Cho Young Nam and Cho Yong Pil, who sang Roh Tae Woo's favorite karaoke number, "Besame Mucho". The convention

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<sup>34</sup> "South Korea Party Chooses Successor for Presidency," on June 03, 1987. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/i94RE>.

concluded with the whole stadium being blanketed with the colorful confetti and everyone cheering for President Chun and Roh Tae Woo.<sup>35</sup>

The celebration of the Minjung Party for its nomination of Chun's successor came at a cost, but it was a defiant and characteristic move on the part of Chun Doo Hwan. The news had been circulating since late May that the Committee on Constitutional Revision, an organization powered by Chun's opposition party, will hold a city-wide rally in Seoul to protest against the military regime and demand a free election. As the date of June 10<sup>th</sup> approached, the city watched with great anxiety as Chun's party held its national convention and nomination of Roh Tae Woo while the students, the Minju party, the Committee on Constitutional Revision, and other anti-Chun groups came out into the streets of Seoul to send Chun a clear message. The Seoul police force heavily barricaded the Jamsil Stadium area since 8 a.m. and was also on standby throughout the city's major venues in anticipation of the massive demonstration organized by the Minju Party to be held in the afternoon. Elementary and middle schools shortened their classes due to all the major streets being closed down, and the government ordered the horns on the buses and taxis to be removed in anticipation of the demonstration.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "A Celebration Amidst Tension: Cheers and Pickets," by Kim Dong Chul. *Donga Newspaper*, June 10, 1987. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/Y43eT>. Translated by the author.

<sup>36</sup> "A Condemning Rally Leads to Dire Circumstances in the City," *Donga Newspaper*, June 10, 1987. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/tHhNm>. Translated by the author.



「6·10대회장」봉쇄 「6·10대회」날인 10일 서울대회장인 대한 성공회당구에 경찰이 아슬부터 봉쇄와 타리 케이드로 삼엄한 잠계함을 띄우고있는 가운데 거리에는 차량의 통행마저 한적하다.

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Figure 1 [6.10 Convention] Barricade. On the morning of June 10, the police barricaded the perimeters and the entrance of the Episcopal Church, reducing street traffic.

While the atmosphere within the Jamsil Stadium was one of perfect harmony and celebration, just outside its doors the rest of the capital of South Korea was under a lockdown. College students from nearly twenty universities in Seoul started to gather around 11 a.m., and several organizations led by the Committee on Constitutional Revision continued with their plans of rally and demonstration against Chun's regime despite the street barricades and the imminent confrontation with the police forces spread throughout the city.

Scheduled to begin at 6 p.m., the rally gained significant momentum already by 4:30 p.m. at sixty different locations throughout Seoul. According to police records, the physical confrontation between the protesters and the police injured two congressmen, 28 protesters, and 738 policemen on this first day of June Uprising.<sup>38</sup> Aside from Seoul, the protest took place at a national scale throughout 20 major cities of South Korea, and although Seoul was the center of the movement, 3,831 protesters were arrested nationwide on June 10.

<sup>37</sup> Image from "A Condemning Rally leads to Dire Circumstances in the City," *Donga Newspaper* on June 10, 1987.

<sup>38</sup> "3,831 Persons Arrested Nationwide for 6.10 Demonstration," from *Donga Newspaper* on June 11, 1987. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/zzDoD>. Translated by the author.

Chun used his military connections at full capacity on June 10<sup>th</sup> to ensure that his party's national convention would commence successfully, and to minimize the impact of the opposition party's demonstration which aimed to challenge the status and authority of his regime. Blockading the major streets in Seoul and stationing the city's police force at all the strategic venues and districts were standard procedures that Chun had practiced when he faced such circumstances, and it was precisely this scale of military mobility in Seoul that had proven to be effective deterrents against the protest organizations in May, 1980. However, in 1987, the sentiments against the military regime had become much stronger and became the major uniting force behind Chun's opposition party. On June 10, the Minju party leader Kim Young Sam and his fellow party members did not budge from their makeshift office in Lotte Hotel. As leaders of the Committee of Constitutional Revision and democratic reform movement, these individuals saw it as their duty and obligation to continue on with the 6 p.m. demonstration despite the sight of the police blockade across the street.

By June 17, Chun still had refused to meet with Kim Young Sam, who now demanded that there can be no negotiations or meaningful discussion without Chun's pardoning and releasing all the protesters he arrested over the course of the seven days. An added demand to this condition, in light of Chun's national party convention on June 10, was that Chun allow a national free election to take place. This was a direct reaction against the appointment of Roh Tae Woo as Chun's successor. Kim Young Sam said on June 17, "If the administration allows for a free election, even now, and promises to respect and abide by the results of the election, then the whole nation will rejoice."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> "Reviewing the Chun Doo Hwan Interview Request," *Donga Newspaper* on June 17, 1987. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/dw5zy>. Translated by the author.

During this period of political uncertainty and daily rallies in the streets of the capital, the South Korean citizens and the politicians also kept a close eye on how US would react to the turbulence. On June 22, 1987, the *Donga Newspaper* reported that "...Gaston Sigur, the US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, was asked by George Schultz, the US Secretary of State, to visit South Korea during his trip to Asia, indicating US's heightened awareness of the current situation. Sigur had initially replied that such a visit may not be necessary just yet, but by the time of his arrival in East Asia he received orders from Schultz to visit Seoul."<sup>40</sup> The article continues, "Although the US has denied that he [Sigur] is a diplomatic envoy, it is unlikely that the visitation is just a light gesture on the part of the US State Department. Firstly, there is the timing of the visit. Second, ever since June 10, the US has been explicitly encouraging dialogue (between the two opposing parties)."<sup>41</sup>

On June 24, 1987, the 'quiet diplomacy' of the Reagan Administration proved to be effective as the two leaders, Kim Young Sam, and Chun Doo Hwan, met at the presidential Blue House for an official negotiation. June 26 would mark the last day of the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic as a direct result of Chun's acceptance of the conditions of the Minju Party. The Minju Party organized a peaceful march to take place in honor of the newly formed constitutional government to take place on the afternoon of the same day. Chun emphasized, however, that while he believes that adopting a constitutional government is a positive move forward for the nation, such a shift should not affect the Minju Party's intentions for its presidential nominee, Roh Tae Woo.

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<sup>40</sup> "US Expresses Intentions and Diagnoses the Situation," *Donga Newspaper*, June 22, 1987. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/iLVsg>. Translated by the author.

<sup>41</sup> "US Expresses Intentions and Diagnoses the Situation," *Donga Newspaper*, June 22, 1987.



*Conclusion*

The June Uprising was a highly organized demonstration that lasted seventeen days in all the major cities of South Korea. Chun's regime had been ruling for seven years, during which time the Korean citizens continued to prosper economically, urbanize, and become educated at rapid speed. The Gwangju Uprising was an experience that made the June Uprising's demonstrators anticipate the worst from the Chun regime in terms of its reaction to the rallies. Some of the student protesters resorted to extremes of self-immolation to ensure that their demands are heard. Due to the growing size of the national demonstration in the course of the seventeen days in addition to pressures from the US and concern for the '88 Seoul Olympics, the regime ceded to the demands of the protesters. The ultimate success of the June Uprising helped the hitherto unaddressed issues of Chun's constitutional violations to be brought up, one of which was the military suppression of the Gwangju Uprising.

Chapter Three: The Memory of Gwangju as the Fulcrum of Politics During the Kim Young Sam Administration

The Gwangju Democratization Movement was once considered a mere 'incident', a chaotic riot of students and citizens of Gwangju. For the fourteen years after the uprising, the government maintained that the 'incident' necessitated military action to ensure the stability of South Korea during the politically unstable period. Although the success of the June Uprising in 1987 provided an opportunity for Gwangju to be officially recognized and memorialized, the administration that replaced Chun's regime did not respond to such requests. In 1987, Roh Tae Woo had won the first presidential election held in South Korea; however, the fact that he was handpicked by Chun Doo Hwan as the party's nominee diminished the democratic spirit of the historic election. Once elected, Roh sought to legitimize his administration as the first, democratic Republic of South Korea by initiating Gwangju Uprising reconciliation programs. However, Roh remained unyielding on the most pressing and controversial issues of the uprising for the duration of his term. Roh's successor Kim Young Sam also took a rather passive stance on the issues concerning truth investigations on Gwangju for the first two years of his term, until unforeseen political circumstances pushed him and his party to radically readdress the Gwangju Uprising.

The Kim Young Sam administration provides numerous examples of the importance of political motivations in fueling a government's active pursuit of reconciling and preserving a specific historical memory. The sudden change of attitude apparent in the administration in 1995 can be studied as a case that clearly demonstrates the importance of the memory of Gwangju for the president and his party in the context of the rapid transition of a country from military rule and government into a democratic civilian government. The newspapers which closely followed

the shift of the administration, its actions, and its actors, further democratized the process of memorialization of Gwangju by providing the nation with an uncensored update on the crucial details of the events for the public. South Korea had certainly come a long way since the days of media censorship under the military rule just a decade ago, but the most indicative barometer of the democratization process is the trial of the two former military rulers and presidents, Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo, for the purpose of clarifying the memory of the Gwangju Uprising.

*The Memory of Gwangju Ignored*

When Kim Young Sam took office as the second president of the 6<sup>th</sup> Republic in 1993, the massacre that transpired in Gwangju in 1980 was a painful memory and an unspoken story. The Gwangju Uprising had an unofficial existence in the national history, kept alive by students, workers, intellectuals, and organizations created by the relatives of those who were affected by the military confrontation. The first official attempt to sort out the truth of the Gwangju took place in November 18, 1988, when the Roh administration conducted a hearing for the investigation of the uprising through the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC). The trial was a national spectacle that yielded more than 40% rating as it aired on television.<sup>42</sup> The NRC had been established by Roh Tae Woo shortly before he won the presidential election, and some speculate that Roh needed to establish his legitimacy by setting up a congressional committee that will stand for bringing justice and instilling democratic values to the event he himself was partly guilty of.

The goal of the NRC was to reveal the truth of Gwangju by clarifying the actors of the massacre, followed by the punishment of the most responsible individuals. However, the end

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<sup>42</sup> Ahn Byung-Oook, 'The Historical Significance of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising' from *History of 518 Democratic Uprising, II* (The May 18 Memorial Foundation: 2001), 1012.

product of the NRC centered on compensation for the victims of the uprising rather than addressing the human rights violations or the scale of the violence committed by the military leaders. The rationale of the NRC for skipping over the investigatory process once the trial was set in motion was that the nation should focus on democratic unity at this fragile point rather than placing blame on each other and cause further strain. NRC maintained that rather than risking a political divide, the Sixth Republic needed to try to preserve peace through compromise among the students, citizens and the government. In its conclusion, the NRC proposed the Gwangju Incident Resolution Policy which redefined the memory of Gwangju in several ways: 1) May 18 will no longer be regarded as a movement of mobsters, 2) the stigma of impure elements will be replaced with positive significance for democratization, 3) the main cause of the violent incident was military suppression rather than citizens' riot, and 4) the government should take full responsibility for the victims and relatives of the injured or deceased by providing compensation and a much delayed apology.<sup>43</sup>

The testimonies of individuals involved in the military suppression of the uprising were decorated with false accounts and did not help realize the goal of revealing the truth of Gwangju, let alone punish those who were most responsible. An example can be found in the vice mayor of Gwangju at the time, Jeong Si-Chae, who recounted that 'only 5 or 6 people died at the time of May 18.'<sup>44</sup> It is interesting, however, that many of the victims' and witnesses' accounts obtained by the NRC directly contradict the testimonies given by individuals in official positions, and the explicit testimonies of military violence against unarmed Gwangju citizens were published on major newspapers for the national readership. The testimony of Chun Choon Nam,

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<sup>43</sup> 'The Struggle for Inquiring into the Truth of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising' by Cho Hyun-Yun, *History of 518 Democratic Uprising*, II. 756.

<sup>44</sup> 518 History Compilation Committee of Gwangju City, 1997, from *Collection of Gwangju Democratization Movement Materials*, vol. 11, p.229, printed in 'The Struggle for Inquiring into the Truth of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising' by Cho Hyun-Yun, *History of 518 Democratic Uprising*, II. 755.

a Gwangju citizen, reveals that the violence escalated each day. Chun Choon Nam testified, “On May 20 at 6 pm, I saw the dead corpses for the first time. I saw two dead men near the Gwangju Train Station, their bodies blanketed with the national flag...By May 21, the Gwangju citizens were armed.”<sup>45</sup> On February 09, 1988, *Donga Newspaper* published such accounts under ‘Contents of Testimonies of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising’ in which people’s testimonies painted a vivid picture of the kind of violence that occurred at Gwangju. The introduction of the article reads, “The contents of the testimonies of Gwangju Democratic Uprising reveal that citizens could not rely only on sticks in their fight against the soldiers’ weapons, while the situation became exacerbated with the rumors spread by the military.”<sup>46</sup> In the testimonies, the speakers talk about specific events such as soldiers violating female students at Am-yang, near the prison, that they consider now to be rumors spread by the military in order to provoke the citizens into confrontation at locations strategic for the military. Their accounts frame the military’s actions as calculating, manipulative, and cruel. The stories of innocent bystanders and helpless female students being stabbed or shot to death along with descriptions of the piles of dead bodies became grim facts of history after these collections of testimonies came to light. The student protest organization’s public affairs representative gave a vivid account, “I witnessed a soldier stab a female student in the chest at Yangdong market, then kick an elderly woman who was trying to stop him. I saw another soldier stab an elderly man with his bayonet on the street behind the city bus terminal.”<sup>47</sup> A high school teacher testified, “As violence

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<sup>45</sup> “Recordings of the Democratic Gwangju Incident Witnesses,” *Donga Ilbo*, February 09, 1988. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/bg2r3>. Translated by the author.

<sup>46</sup> “The Contents of the Testimonies of Gwangju Democratic Uprising,” *Donga Ilbo*, February 09, 1988, accessed on October 23, 2011. <http://goo.gl/Gza6M>. Translated by the author.

<sup>47</sup> “Gwangju Testimony,” *HanGyuRae Newspaper*, Feb.24, 1989. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/Gza6M>. Translated by the author.

progressed into May 18<sup>th</sup>, I saw an elderly woman in the street gathering bricks and lamenting, “These men are killing all our young ones, they are worse than the communist!”<sup>48</sup>

The pieces of truth awakened the nation’s interest in Gwangju, but President Roh acted quickly to prevent the full investigation of the uprising. Both Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo belonged to the same political circle, and before the advent of the 6<sup>th</sup> Republic, Roh was a military official that aided Chun in putting down the uprising in Gwangju. The two men shared the responsibilities of the events at Gwangju as they held positions of power during the uprising, and with Roh at the head of the state and his party in power at the time of the investigation, it was not only sensible but necessary for Roh to shorten the national hearing on the truth inquiry on May 18. Thus, the first official attempt to recognize the events of the Gwangju Uprising ended on an unsuccessful note. Chun Doo Hwan was allowed to walk away with only an apology to those affected by the Gwangju uprising, and Roh Tae Woo administration successfully dodged having to reveal the truth about Chun’s role in the military confrontation.

Efforts to appease the victims and relatives of the deceased were made in the form of monetary compensation, and some efforts were made to redefine May 18 as a positive and important event in the history of South Korean democratization. Whereas the high school textbooks in 1982 characterized the time period of Gwangju as one of persistent chaos that necessitated strict government measures to prevent North Korean military invasion as well as maintain domestic order, the 1990 version of the same passage recognized that the military seized political power through unconstitutional means which prompted the citizens and students to lead demonstrations for democratization and against martial law. Most importantly, May 18 was no longer an event marked with ‘chaos’ but a legitimate part of the ‘democratization

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<sup>48</sup> “Gwangju Testimony,” *HanGyuRae Newspaper*, Feb.24, 1989.

movement' of South Korea.<sup>49</sup> For Roh, his administration, and his party, this was the extent of the concession they could make without jeopardizing their status in the rapidly democratizing polity. Victims' compensations temporarily appeased the most vocal groups who were demanding the truth of Gwangju Uprising, and the official recognition of the uprising as a democratization movement helped frame the Roh regime as a legitimate, democratic government in the eyes of the public. However, Roh was significantly limited in the courses of action he could take using the memory of Gwangju because his involvement was too intimately tied to the brutalities of the Gwangju Uprising, and thus he was unable to take any further initiatives on utilizing the memory of Gwangju as an instrument to gain popularity.

*Time Will Be the Judge*

The unresolved elements of the Gwangju memory were directly inherited by Roh's successor, Kim Young Sam, when he came into office in 1993. However, South Korea was also celebrating a political milestone in Kim Young Sam's election victory as it marked the first occasion in which the president had no military background. Roh Tae Woo, Chun Doo Hwan, Park Chung Hee all shared a military background and did not hesitate to use their authority over the military to attain their political goals. With Kim Young Sam's inauguration, the nation could finally welcome an era in which the military would no longer be able to interfere with national politics. It was this notion of *shinhangook*, or new Korea, that contributed to the Gwangju investigation efforts during Kim Young Sam's term. In his inaugural speech on February 25, 1993, Kim Young Sam addressed the nation as *shinhangook* throughout and shared the various plans he had for the progress of this new South Korea. Kim Young Sam announced:

I dream of a shinhangook (new Korea). Shinhangook will be a freer, more developed democratic society. It is a society in which justice is abundant. It is a society of peace. It is a society in which culture and humanity are respected. It is a place where the divided nation is peacefully

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<sup>49</sup> 'The Struggle for Inquiring into the Truth', 772.

reunited. This nation is at the center of a new civilization, a nation which contributes to world peace and the progress of mankind. Shinhangook will be a place where anyone can find work, and our descendents will take pride that they were born on this land. Let us all share this one dream. We are the nation that made a miracle out of the trials of colonization and the ruins of war. Let us continue to move forward with all our might.<sup>50</sup>

It is interesting that Korea is being referred to as a newer, more improved version with a greater commitment toward democracy and freedom. Kim Young Sam's lofty dreams for a new Korean society in which human rights and people's freedoms are respected by the government were met with grievances of Gwangju Uprising memorial organizations.

Meanwhile, organizations pushing for the truth and punishment of the responsible individuals had become more active throughout the early 1990s following the unsatisfactory ruling and conclusion of the NRC. But as was the case with Roh's administration, the memory of Gwangju could be used as a political tool to help the party advance or maintain its place when trying to position itself in a favorable way within the new dynamics of democratic politics. Kim Young Sam administration merely continued the compensation program that Roh had begun, and made modifications in the budget in reaction to the growing numbers of people seeking such compensation. Despite Kim Young Sam's vision of the new Korea, he took actions similar to Roh administration as he also avoided truth investigation of Gwangju Uprising, though he did not share intimate ties to the uprising. His motive had more to do with his political ties with both Roh and Chun since his political party was an amalgamation of those established by the two former presidents. Thus, in the early years of his term Kim Young Sam was often criticized for stating, in response to the continuous demands for truth and legality of the events in Gwangju and the enforcement of martial law in 1980, that 'history will be the judge.'<sup>51</sup> When asked about the kind of relationship he plans to establish with the former presidents in January, 1993, Kim

<sup>50</sup> "President Kim Young Sam's Inaugural Speech," from *Maeil Kyungjae Newspaper* on February 25, 1993. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/TXa90>. Translated by the author.

<sup>51</sup> "12.12 History Will Be the Judge," *HanGyeoRae News*, May 09, 1993. Accessed on October 22, 2011. <http://goo.gl/wkBmx>. Translated by the author.



Young Sam had stated that the former republic had made improvements toward democracy but also committed unlawful actions. He concluded that “history will evaluate these past administrations”.<sup>52</sup>

His decidedly passive stance on dealing with the history of Gwangju frustrated many victims’ groups who felt that the government needed to actively bring justice to the uprising by conducting retrials with Chun and Roh and thorough investigations.

### *Gwangju Will Be the Judge*

In the mid-1990s, however, an event served as a catalyst that swiftly turned the tables on Kim Young Sam administration and its attitude toward the state of matters concerning the Gwangju Uprising. In late 1995, it became common knowledge that both Roh Tae Woo and Chun Doo Hwan had embezzled funds and taken bribes from major business conglomerates such as Daewoo and Samsung, in addition to grossly misappropriating public funds to build their private accounts and wealth. Unlike the Gwangju Uprising, which evoked strongest outcry among those directly affected and others who had a special interest in bringing justice, the Roh and Chun scandal angered all citizens across political lines and regionalism, at the thought of their taxes being used to support the luxurious lifestyles of the former presidents. The strong negative sentiments toward Roh and Chun also applied to Kim Young Sam as people saw him as their ally, and thus it became important for Kim Young Sam administration to distance itself from the two former leaders and their current negative image. Therefore, in conjunction with the growing pressures for the administration to be more active on its inquiry of the truth of Gwangju and punishing the wrongdoers, the Gwangju Uprising provided an opportunity for the administration to differentiate themselves from the old leaders.

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<sup>52</sup> “I Plan to Eradicate Regional Quarries in Five Years,” *Maeil Kyongjae Newspaper*, January 01, 1993. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/o9YbM>. Translated by the author.

The first step to switching gears on the administration's projects related to Gwangju Uprising was to enact the Act on Special Cases Concerning the 518 Democratization Movement, Etc. on December 21, 1995. The Special Act retracted the term 'compensation' and replaced it with 'reparation' in regards to the monetary sums paid to the victims and relatives of those who were affected by the military confrontation. This exchange of words served as an implicit recognition that the military had acted unconstitutionally in incurring violence, as the word 'compensation' implies that the suppression was legal and constitutional, whereas 'reparation' implies that the victims were wrongfully treated as a result of the unlawful exercise of government's military power. The Article 6 of the act made sure that the "compensation pursuant to the Act of Compensation, Etc., for Persons Involved in the Gwangju Democratization Movement shall be regarded as reparation."<sup>53</sup>

Most importantly, the Special Act set the stage for the Trial of the Century, with two former presidents of South Korea forced to testify while the enraged nation watched. This legislation ultimately allowed for the prosecution of Roh and Chun for their roles in the Gwangju massacre as its Article 2 made it explicit that the Statute of Limitations 'with respect to the crimes of disrupting constitutional order... before and after May 18, 1980... the statute of limitations shall be deemed discontinued during the period the cause of trouble occurred in the exercise of the national right to a criminal prosecution."<sup>54</sup> If the Kim Young Sam administration were to continue to pursue its 'history will be the judge' stance, justice would never be fulfilled since it was legally impossible to prosecute Roh and Chun for their presumed crimes in Gwangju

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<sup>53</sup> Special Act on the May 18 Democratization Movement, Etc. Act No.5029, Dec.21, 1995. From 'Enactment of the 518 Special Law and Legal Liquidation,' Park Won-Soon, *History of 518 Democratization Movement*, II. 581. Translated by 518 History Compilation Committee of Gwangju City.

<sup>54</sup> Special Act on the May 18 Democratization Movement, Etc. Act No.5029, Dec.21, 1995. From A Complete Collection of the Korea Laws and Regulations Concerning the May 18 Democratic Uprising (Gwangju: The May 18 Memorial Foundation, 2007) 6. Translated by Korea Legislation Research Institute.

due to the 15-year statute of limitations which had expired by May of 1995. Kim Young Sam administration simply had to follow the law, which in its current form favored the passive course of action. However, with the new Act in place, the usual code of criminal procedure no longer posed an obstacle and enabled the active investigation of the events and crimes committed at Gwangju by the military leader and general.

On May 18, 1995, a Korean History professor at Koryeo University named Kang Man Kil wrote an article in *HanGyuRae Newspaper* criticizing Kim Young Sam administration's passive attitude toward May 18, the message of which turned out to be quite prophetic in the following months. Professor Kang pointed out that as time passes, history will judge the Kim Young Sam administration based on how it handled, or refused to handle, the issues of Gwangju Uprising. He said, "It is important to keep in mind that one of the standards our future generations will use to evaluate Kim Young Sam will be how he treated the Gwangju Uprising... In their research of Gwangju, future historians will evaluate Kim Young Sam for his treatment of the hitherto incomplete reconciliation of Gwangju Uprising... and the ruthless truth will reflect the character of the Kim Young Sam administration and serve as its evaluator."<sup>55</sup> Only six months after this article was published, Kim Young Sam enacted the Special Acts, and within days former presidents Roh and Chun were arrested to be tried for their involvement in the May 18 case. Kim Young Sam's party swiftly changed its name from Democratic Liberal Party, which was connected to Roh in obvious ways, to the New Korea Party. This was a politically critical moment for Kim Young Sam administration as it faced the mid-term elections of 1996 with widespread unpopularity due to Roh and Chun scandals. The trial of Roh and Chun for their responsibilities in Gwangju massacre would serve as a vehicle of appeasement for the many

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<sup>55</sup> Kang Man Gil, 'Gwangju Will Be the Judge of the Administration,' *HanGyuRae Newspaper*, May 18, 1995. Accessed on October 25, 2011. <http://goo.gl/0qjrj>. Translated by the author.

in opposition to Roh and consequently Kim Young Sam, as well as a very public break between the old military leaders and the new civilian government. Gwangju became a decisive factor almost overnight in determining the future of New Korea Party and Kim Young Sam administration.

### *The Trial of the Century*

The trial of Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo on March 11, 1996, was a greatly anticipated event for many Koreans, but the trial was also a topic of global interest. To have two former presidents of a country sitting side by side at the defendants' table to be interrogated for numerous counts of human rights and constitutional violations made a truly rare and unprecedented sight, and the *Donga Newspaper* was quick to dub it as "The Trial of the Century," citing that over 70 foreign media located in Seoul hurried to send over 180 reporters to the court for a coverage of the trial.<sup>56</sup> As the trial progressed over the course of five months, scholars commented that the condemnation of the two former presidents would significantly shape the chapter of South Korean history on its 5<sup>th</sup> Republic by clearly defining the actors and causes of the December 12 coup d'état and the May 18 Democratization Movement.

As a political tool, the trial was effective in two ways for Kim Young Sam as he tried to salvage his party from the vast unpopularity. First, the trial helped not only to bring out the truth of Gwangju by an explicit outline of Chun's role in orchestrating the attacks over the course of the ten days surrounding May 18 Uprising, but it also brought justice to the victims of the uprising through the indictment of Chun, along with Roh, for murder and brutal repression of the demonstration in Gwangju. Second, the indictments provided a concrete base for further

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<sup>56</sup> 'Over 70 International Media Compete to Obtain Media Coverage Permits for Trial of the Century, the Concurrent Trial of Two Former Presidents,' *Donga Newspaper*, March 10, 1996. <http://goo.gl/1SUdl>. Translated by the author.

reconciliatory acts toward the victims of the Gwangju Uprising and helped reshape the role and meaning of the May 18 movement in the context of the history of South Korean democratization.

Kim Young Sam's efforts to bring justice to the victims and punish those responsible individuals set him and his administration apart from Roh's and Chun's military governments as the trial was an opportune moment to legitimize the civilian government against the military governments of the past. Although Roh's government officially marks the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> Republic and democracy, his military background and connections are still reflected in the characteristics of his administration and thus Kim Young Sam is considered the first head of a civilian government. Although the trial may have served as a concession or appeasement toward the critics of Kim Young Sam and his hitherto forgiving and passive attitude toward Chun and Roh, the procession of the trial immediately invited sharp criticism as people began to question Kim Young Sam's motives for suddenly pursuing a completely opposite approach, going as far as suspending the statute of limitations to enable the persecution of Chun and Roh. One explanation for the suddenness of the shift may be found in the months leading up to Kim Young Sam administration's decision to pursue the Trial of the Century. In January 1995, the famous TV mini-series *Moraesigae* (Sandglass) captivated the Korean audience and brought the memory and history of the Gwangju Democratization Movement as well as the "Gwangju problem" back into public discussion. Roh, ever the military leader, failed to act in accordance with the intensifying interests of the public in the resolution of the crimes committed in Gwangju, and is quoted to have said in October of 1995 that "the Gwangju 'incident' is nothing compared to what happened in China during its Cultural Revolution," a comment that undoubtedly infuriated a public imbued with indignant attitudes toward the corruptions of '80s as portrayed in

*Moraesigae*.<sup>57</sup> The title of the article featuring the comment, “Roh Tae Woo Makes Absurd Comment about 518”, suggests that South Koreans regarded Roh as out of touch with the evolving significance of May 18 in South Korean society. Although Roh’s bribery scandal ultimately pronounced him the greatest political liability for Kim Young Sam administration, it was the public persecution of Roh and his involvement in the “Gwangju problem” that the administration could attempt to clean up its image. The trial was deemed as an ambitious project of the administration, but it held more potential for boosting public approval of the administration than other courses of action available in the short period after Roh was indicted of bribery in November of 1995. The questionable motives behind the change of philosophy from ‘history will be the judge’ to ‘we must judge’ was a risk that the administration was willing to take, and the official enactment of the Special Laws on December, 1995, helped them appear more genuine in their approach as it made concrete changes necessary for a retrial.



(Left) Roh Tae Woo, (Right) Chun Doo Hwan on August 26, 1996 at their sentencing hearing

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<sup>57</sup> “Roh Tae Woo Makes Absurd Remarks on 518, Kim Young Sam Administration blames Asylum,” *HanGyuRae Newspaper*, October 13, 1995. <http://goo.gl/gSwqp>. Translated by the author.

As the trial progressed, people were very critical of the apparent nonchalance of Chun as he claimed to have forgotten important details or flatly denied accusations made against him. The majority of the trial focused on the illegality of martial law which was enacted on May 17, 1980, by Chun, and much of the discussion centered on the legality of Chun's usurpation of such power. The trial, however, was ineffective in uncovering Chun's role in the military operations that were carried out in Gwangju as he claimed that he had little to no communication with generals deployed to Gwangju during the course of the uprising. Chun instead gave an account that featured him as a peacemaker who tried to end the civilians' demonstration in a peaceful manner by encouraging President Choi to visit Gwangju in the midst of the confrontation.<sup>58</sup> People reading about these hearings on their daily newspapers were angered by Chun's brazen attitude and creative answers as he continuously denied that anyone ever reported death tolls or other crucial information about the progress of the military confrontation in Gwangju. By the end of the Trial of the Century, people vocalized their discontentment toward the lack of investigation on the details of Chun's leadership in Gwangju massacre as well as the utter lack of any signs of repentance throughout the trial. On August 27, 1996, TV broadcasts and pictures in the newspapers showed Chun and Roh looking calm and serene and overall glad that the trial was over, even after the announcement of a death sentence for Chun and a 22 years and 6 months prison sentence for Roh.<sup>59</sup>

### *The Restoration the Memory of May 18 Uprising*

The first formidable commemoration event for May 18 took place in 1995, with private as well as government sectors supporting the Gwangju Democratic Uprising Memorial Foundation with their preparation. However, the focus of the Foundation as well as those who

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<sup>58</sup> "Chun 'tried to convince President Choi to Visit Gwangju', 12.12. and 5.18 7<sup>th</sup> Hearing," *HanGyuRae Newspaper*, May 07, 1996. <http://goo.gl/gvzHg>. Translated by the author.

<sup>59</sup> "Two Former Presidents, Hand in Hand," *Donga Newspaper*, August 27, 1996. <http://goo.gl/DkVbd>. Image.

took interest in commemorating May 18 was on bringing justice to the reputation of the movement rather than remembering a historical moment since the Gwangju Uprising was still a matter to be sorted out. Kim Young Sam administration would not switch over from the 'history will be the judge' stance until months later. By late 1995, people rallied in Seoul as part of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gwangju Democratic Movement in order to encourage the government to pass the Special Laws, which had not finalized until late December. The enactment of the Special Law legitimized the history of Gwangju Uprising, and Article 5 of the act explicitly stated that 'The government shall promote commemorative work succeeding to the spirit of the Gwangju Democratization Movement'.<sup>60</sup> Thus, simultaneously with the progression of the Trial of the Century, plans for a more formal memorial event took place in preparation for the commemorative service in 1996. On May 9, 1997, the Kim Young Sam administration declared May 18 as a national holiday, and additionally built the Gwangju Democratic Uprising Cemetery on May 16. By 1997, the government was more involved than ever before in the commemorative events hosted by the May 18 Memorial Foundation and for the first time, made especially official by the attendance of the Prime Minister. From the beginning of the May 18 Foundation in 1994 up to 1997, the foundation's major projects all dealt with petitioning against the government to bring Roh and Chun to trial as well as for the government to officially honor the memory of May 18 by recognizing the victims and their families. Although the foundation continued to vocalize similar sentiments after 1997, for example in organizing campaigns against Kim Young Sam's pardoning Chun and Roh, the Kim Young Sam administration was more proactive about initiating memorial projects in response to the foundation and other such organizations' suggestions. The most significant government contribution toward memorial

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<sup>60</sup> Special Act on the May 18 Democratization Movement, Etc. Act No.5029, Dec.21, 1995. From 'Enactment of the 518 Special Law and Legal Liquidation,' Park Won-Soon, *History of 518 Democratization Movement*, II. 581. Translated by 518 History Compilation Committee of Gwangju City.



projects was the designation of memorial spaces throughout Gwangju such as the Mongwol Cemetery, Memorial Park, Liberty Park, the Gwangju Democratic Uprising Square, and the preservation of spaces relevant to the uprising.

### *Conclusion*

The Kim Young Sam administration was caught in between the old regime and the public of the new, democratic republic, and the administration saw an opportunity in officially redefining the memory of Gwangju as a way to save itself from falling approval ratings. The administration completely changed its stance on its course of action regarding the “Gwangju problem” by switching gears from inactivity to putting on a full, public trial of Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo. Although the trial did not satisfy all the demands of the Gwangju memorial organizations as Chun and Roh did not admit to the orchestration of military operations staged against the Gwangju civilians in the uprising, Chun and Roh’s indictments symbolically helped clear the memory of Gwangju Uprising with the implication that the government suppressed a democratic movement using the military against the citizens’ demonstration. Without the trial, the official memory of Gwangju would not have done justice to the victims of the movement, nor would the government efforts to commemorate the uprising fully encompass its significance in the history of South Korean democratization.

#### Chapter Four: The Competing Visions of Gwangju

As discussed in Chapter 3, the memory of the May 18 Gwangju Uprising became an important asset for the first presidents of the democratic Sixth Republic. Presidents Roh Tae Woo and Kim Young Sam both held public investigations of the unresolved and questionable aspects of the government's role during the Gwangju Uprising in order to validate their own positions as leaders of a democratic nation. Each president also acknowledged the uprising as an official part of modern South Korean history and effectively tied the significance of the event to the contemporary South Korean democratic values. However, no president has made a greater effort to memorialize the Gwangju Uprising than President Kim Dae Jung. He took the compensation program for the victims of the uprising one step further by initiating government decrees to recognize and honor as a nation those who took part in the demonstration. What had been tragic casualties turned into a heroic tale of martyrdom, and Kim Dae Jung materialized this interpretation further by supporting memorial monument projects throughout Gwangju. While the motivations of his two predecessors Roh and Kim Young Sam were transparently political for the most part, Kim Dae Jung's personal connection to the Gwangju region and the uprising in 1980 was the force behind his proactive memorialization efforts.

This chapter will highlight the role of regionalism in South Korean politics and also will discuss the process of erecting a monument along with the different messages a memorial site communicates to the visitors. Collective memory, or 'collected memory' as historian James E. Young suggests, does not exist in a vacuum but is shaped and gathered over time as it passes through different regimes, leaders, and generations.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the various versions or interpretations of one event that coexist within a society often compete against one another to

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<sup>61</sup> James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993), xi.

gain acceptance in the public, thereby constituting a texture of the memory. The study of the most recent major representations of the memory of Gwangju Uprising reveals the extent to which regionalism and politics continue to add to the complex texture of the memory of the uprising in the South Korean society.

More specifically, this last chapter will be an examination of Kim Dae Jung's impact on the memorial practice regarding the Gwangju Uprising today and the ways in which the current political atmosphere interacts, or competes, with the interpretation as concretized by Kim Dae Jung during his presidency. The particular ethos set forth by Kim Dae Jung is directly countered by the current administration regarding the Gwangju Uprising memorial practices, and the resulting tension provides yet another layer or texture to the memory of the Gwangju Uprising at large. The analysis of the Mangwol Cemetery will provide an insight of the Kim Dae Jung administration's interpretation of the uprising. The site is one of the most prominent memorial spaces in Gwangju, further emphasized by the fact that rituals for the dead hold an especially important place in the Korean society. The sculpture, monument, and the museum found at the Mangwol Cemetery communicate the spirit of martyrdom that Kim Dae Jung tried to emphasize in his telling of Gwangju Uprising. The version of the Gwangju Uprising as retold on the Mangwol Cemetery delivers the powerful message of the ideals of democracy, martyrdom, and national pride in a tangible and monumental way.

Second, the recent debate over the deletion of May 18<sup>th</sup> Gwangju Democratic Uprising in the middle school textbooks will be discussed to contrast with Kim Dae Jung's approach of the same historical event. This incident reveals that while a memorial monument, sculpture, or a site may have permanence, the collective memory of an event itself is fluid and subject to modification. The uproar against the Department of Education was too prominent to ignore for

the deletion in the textbook to take effect, but the debate itself provides startling proof of the fragile state of the memory of Gwangju Uprising in the minds of many Koreans thirty one years later. Thus, the comparison between the distinct memorial activities in 1998-2003 period and 2004-present day reveals the ongoing struggle between different, opposing actors who try to preserve their vision of the memory over others.

### *Mangwol Cemetery Visited*

As you approach the small hill at the foot of Mount Mudung, you will notice that the road leading to the Mangwol Cemetery appears to be freshly paved, accompanied by neat rows of trees and a sidewalk. Compared to the old, small town that you would have just passed to get to the Mangwol Cemetery, the pale concrete road that starts at Mount Mudung suggests the magnitude of government investment in this particular area of the Mangwol district. As you



Figure 1 Mangwol Cemetery in 1980

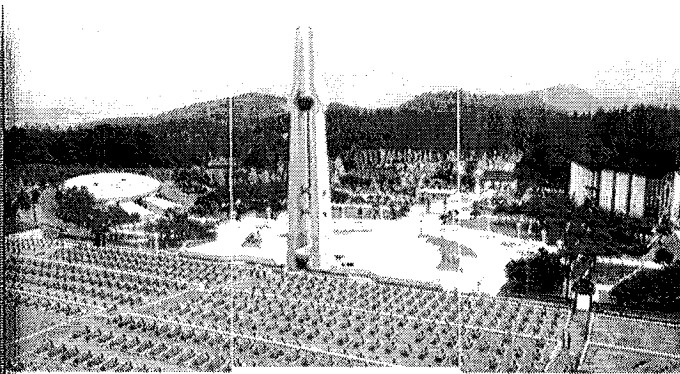


Figure 2 Mangwol Cemetery today, complete with the May 18 Memorial Tower

walk cross the spacious parking lots toward the front gate of the Mangwol Cemetery, you will see the traditional front gate made of green and red is one of the most visited Gwangju Uprising memorial sites.

Immediately after the uprising in 1980, this hill was turned into a makeshift graveyard as family members and fellow demonstrators buried the corpses that they had removed from the streets and other scenes of confrontation in Gwangju. It is startling to compare the hill as it was in 1980 with the Mangwol Cemetery which opened in 1997.<sup>62 63</sup>

The May 18 Democratization Movement Memorial Tower stands at the bottom floor of the tiered burial site. This monumental pillar is a modern representation of the traditional Korean stone flagpole. Made of two symmetrical pillars, the tower stands 40 meters tall is the first marker that commands attention as one nears the memorial site. The monumental pillar contributes the most to set a futuristic atmosphere within the memorial site even as the centuries-old burial practices take place immediately behind it. Toward the upper half of the pillar, you can discern the oval-shaped sculpture clasped by two hands. It looks as though the sculpture is suspended between the two pillars, which is a symbolic representation of resurrection.

As a visitor, one of the most striking aspects of the initial impression of the monument is the combination of traditional and abstract elements on display. The abstract nature of this simple yet larger-than-life pillar certainly adds to the ‘myth’ of the heroes of the Gwangju Uprising that is central to the overall presentation of the Mangwol Cemetery. According to Young, the abstract memorials are capable of conveying a specific version of a memory, and Mangwol Cemetery was no exception.<sup>64</sup> Young suggests that ‘abstraction encourages private visions in viewers’, and the monumental pillars invite the visitor to take a moment to understand its meaning in the context of the memorial space.<sup>65</sup> The monumental tower is an enigmatic sight to behold at first, and although the curves outlining the oval sculpture become identifiable as two

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<sup>62</sup> Figure 1. ‘Mangwol-dong’. Retrieved from May 18 Memorial Foundation <http://518.org/main.html?TM18MF=A0303>.

<sup>63</sup> Figure 2. ‘May 18 National Cemetery’. Retrieved from May 18 National Cemetery <http://518.mpva.go.kr/>.

<sup>64</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 10.

<sup>65</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 10.

would have encountered before reaching the burial grounds and the tower that would have primed his or her experience at this inner courtyard.

The main entrance to the Mangwol Cemetery is built to look like a traditional Korean gate, using such recognizable colors as green and red for the pillars and topped with a giwa roof, or the dark clay tile roof. Right below the roof it is clearly labeled, “The Gate of Democracy”, and one can see the bottom half of the monumental pillar through the doorway. Figure 2 is a picture taken outside The Gate of Democracy on May 17, 2011.<sup>66</sup> Political figures, both from the region and those who are active in Seoul, annually visit the cemetery to attend the memorial service and to honor the dead.<sup>67</sup> It is rather a surprise to walk through The Gate of Democracy because what one finds on the other side of this traditionally Korean architecture is something entirely unexpected. The Square of Democracy, which spans 9,900m<sup>2</sup> before the worship and burial grounds, shines brightly in white from the flooring material. The white, spot-free Square seems oddly out of place and even out of time in a way, and standing in the Square one can see the full length of the pillars and the hands holding the oval sculpture. The scale of the pillars together with the white flooring in the courtyard communicates distinct impressions of the actors whose support and vision are presented in this site.

Figure 3 The Gate of Democracy on May 17, 2011



Figure 2 Prime Minister of South Korea walking across the Square of Democracy on May 17, 1980,



<sup>66</sup> Figure 2: The Gate of Democracy. Photo by author. May 17, 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Figure 3: The Prime Minister of South Korea (center) walking making his way across the Square of Democracy to attend the memorial service. Photo by author. May 17, 1980.

*The President Behind the Myth*

The Mangwol Cemetery was one of the first major memorial projects of the Gwangju Uprising to be set in motion in Gwangju in the mid-90s. The grandiose structures and the materials that were used in the memorial reveal that the memorialization of the Gwangju Uprising was a national priority in the recent Korean history. The construction of the cemetery began in November 1, 1994, with a government support of 26.1 billion KRW (22.9 million USD) and was completed on May 16, 1997.<sup>68</sup> When the new cemetery opened at the 17<sup>th</sup> anniversary of May 18 Democratization Uprising in 1997, President Kim Young Sam was in attendance along with the opposition party leader and his successor Kim Dae Jung. The Gwangju Uprising had often been used to evaluate Kim Young Sam's performance as a president, but the widespread dissatisfaction of his truth investigation efforts overshadowed his support for these large-scale memorial projects in Gwangju. Kim Dae Jung, on the other hand, completed the myth of the fallen Gwangju citizen-heroes during his term by enacting laws that would honor the participants.

As a state-funded project, the Mangwol Cemetery needed to convey the message of democratic values and also reflect a memorial-worthy myth. The distinction between victim and patriot was left unclear at the earlier stages of the project, however. The issue lay in the designation of the cemetery as a national cemetery, which would not be possible unless the buried individuals are considered national patriots rather than victims of a military suppression. By 1997, May 18 had been recognized as a national memorial day. However, the idea that the people who died during the military confrontation are national heroes who sacrificed their lives for democracy was a narrative that was added during Kim Dae Jung's presidency.

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<sup>68</sup> Jung Ho-Gi, *The Memorial Event and Project of the Gwangju Democratic Uprising: Toward a Bright Future for the Gwangju Democratic Uprising* from *History of May 18 Democratic Uprising, II* (Gwangju: The May 18 Memorial Foundation, 2008), 822.

On January 26, 2002, the Act on the Honorable Treatment of Persons of Distinguished Services to May 18 Democratization Movement was enacted by the Kim Dae Jung administration. The act not only remedied the issue of victim vs. patriot regarding the buried men and women, but it also made it possible for the Mangwol Cemetery to become recognized as a national cemetery within the same year. Additionally, the act made powerful assertions concerning the significance of the participants of the Gwangju Uprising regarding the current state of democracy in South Korea. Article 1 of the act states that the ‘purpose of this Act is to spread the noble value of democracy among the public and to contribute to the development of democracy’.<sup>69</sup> The introduction continues by asserting that the ‘honorable treatment to persons who have sacrificed themselves for the May 18 Democratization movement’ is a necessary step for a democratic state.<sup>70</sup> This is a reverent attitude that is markedly different from the Act on Payment, Etc. for Persons Related to the May 18 Democratization Movement which was passed in 1990. The 1990 Act on Payment refers to the participants only as ‘the dead... individuals in relation to the May 18 Democratization Movement’.<sup>71</sup> The 2002 Act on Honorable Treatment is a novel attempt at recalling the memories of the Gwangju Uprising because other mainstream versions of the memory in existence at the time were more inclined to portray the dead as victims.

It was a norm for the popular movies that were released in the 1990s that used the Gwangju Uprising as their backdrop to portray the characters as helpless victims of the military regime. *A Petal*(1996) is a film that focuses on how a young girl’s life was affected by the

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<sup>69</sup> Act on the Honorable Treatment of Persons of Distinguished Services to May 18 Democratization Movement. Act No.6650, Jan.26, 2002. *A Complete Collection of the Korea Laws and Regulations Concerning the May 18 Democratic Uprising*. (Gwangju: The May 18 Memorial Foundation, 2007), 86.

<sup>70</sup> Act on the Honorable Treatment of Persons of Distinguished Services to May 18 Democratization Movement, 86.

<sup>71</sup> Act on Payment, Etc. for Persons Related to the May 18 Democratization Movement. Act No.4266, Aug.6, 1990. *A Complete Collection of the Korea Laws and Regulations Concerning the May 18 Democratic Uprising*. (Gwangju: The May 18 Memorial Foundation, 2007), 10.



Gwangju Uprising as she is forced to watch her mother die and gets separated from the rest of her family. The main character suffers from the shock of the experience for years after leaving the tragic scene, and she is unable to reunite with her family after such a drastic transformation of both her perception of society and the physical setting of Gwangju. *A Petal* highlights the brutalities committed by the military during the uprising and shows the sufferings of the innocent citizens through the character of the nameless girl.

*Peppermint Candy*(1999) is another film that gained popularity for its portrayal of the psychological effects of the Gwangju Uprising on the participants. The main character Kim Yong Ho is an ex-soldier who had participated in the military side of the Gwangju Uprising. He had blindly killed a student on a street during the uprising and is shown to suffer from the guilt of his action to the point of becoming suicidal later in his life. Although he was part of the military that put down the uprising, Yong Ho's struggle with his depression is a vivid tale of how the military regime victimized an individual.

If there is a commonality between these two movies, it is that the main characters are victims who have little agency in the way the uprising unfolded or how it affected their lives afterward. The focus of the movies as well as the public reception to these movies throughout the 1990s had been the victims of the Gwangju 'massacre', and the Act on Payment, Etc. for Persons Related to the May 18 Democratization movement reflects the demands of the public as well as the relatives of the affected victims. When the government issued the Act on the Honorable Treatment of Persons of Distinguished Services to May 18 Democratization Movement in 2002, it offered an alternate way the society could perceive and remember the victims. The act boldly proclaims that the philosophy behind the act lay in the significance of May 18 on South Korean democracy. Additionally it states that 'human rights shall be

permanently respected as a paragon of noble love of our country and people'.<sup>72</sup> The act also refers to the deaths as 'sacrifices' for democratization and enumerates that anyone who has died, were injured, or were victims in some way during the May 18 Democratization Movement, will be considered 'persons of distinguished services to the May 18 Democratization Movement'.<sup>73</sup> The persons that would be worthy of honor for their relation to the Gwangju Uprising were defined in a broad way under this act, and the importance of the uprising for the fruition of South Korean democracy is heavily emphasized. The version of the memory of Gwangju that had been established by the previous Kim Young Sam administration was reinvented during Kim Dae Jung's presidency, and words such as 'death' and 'victim' were replaced with 'sacrifice' and 'persons of distinguished services'.

The Mangwol Cemetery certainly appears to be a place of honoring and remembering those who died during the May 18 Democratization Movement in Gwangju. The futuristic and modern atmosphere of the cemetery when compared to the tradition Korean burial grounds may initially confuse an observer, and the 40m pillars may grab attention but do not make obvious references to the Gwangju Uprising. However, there are a few art pieces throughout the memorial site that make very explicit and clear conclusions about the uprising. Once one crosses the Democracy Square and enters the worshipping grounds, two bronze sculptures come into visual located on either side of the monumental pillars at the foot of the worshipping square. The sculptures make up a set entitled "Grassroots' Resistance of May", and the sculptures delineate a vivid myth of the Gwangju Uprising. The sculptures are called "Bronze Statue of Armed Resistance Force", and they depict an active scene of armed civilians raising a flag, sounding alarm, and staying alert. The men appear to be working as a unit for the sake of each other's

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<sup>72</sup> Act on the Honorable Treatment of Persons of Distinguished Services to May 18 Democratization Movement. 86.

<sup>73</sup> Act on the Honorable Treatment of Persons of Distinguished Services to May 18 Democratization Movement. 86-87.

survival, and the portrayal of selflessness found in the sculptures adds visuals to the story of heroes of democracy being commemorated at this memorial site. The sculptures encourage the observer to honor these people for what they boldly attempted to do rather than mourn for what happened to them.

While these sculptures attempt to retell the story of the victims through a dynamic snapshot of the battle scene, another art work at the memorial site takes on an even greater task of placing the May 18 Democratization Movement within the historiography of Korean struggles against oppression and injustice. In order to fulfill this goal, the Bas-Reliefs are installed in the garden area. The reliefs take the major markers of Korean history as their subject and glorify the patriotic struggles of Korean history along with the Gwangju Uprising. The reliefs depict the Korean loyal troops during the Japanese Invasion of Korea in 1592, the Donghak Peasant Revolution, the March 1<sup>st</sup> Independence Movement of 1919, the Gwangju Student Independence Movement of 1929, the April 19 Revolution in 1960, and finally the May 18 Gwangju Democratization Movement. The events being portrayed in these sculptures convey a sense of timelessness of a Korean spirit of independence and strength against oppressive antagonistic forces. Within the context of the historiography determined by the reliefs, the memory of the struggle of Gwangju students and workers in 1980 is one of martyrdom and sacrifice, as asserted by the recent Act on Honorable Treatment.

### *Nation and Gwangju*

The city of Gwangju is abundant in Gwangju Uprising memorial sites and parks. Although Mangwol Cemetery is one of the most impressionable memorial site, visitors can find numerous memorial facilities in the city without having to drive up to the Mangwol district to visit the Mangwol Cemetery. The May 18 Liberty Park attracts many visitors as the 204,985m<sup>2</sup>

area contains the May 18 Cultural Memorial Hall, the Daedong Unity Square, Memorial Sculpture Area, Gwangju Student Education and Culture Center, among other facilities dedicated to the commemoration of May 18.<sup>74</sup> Middle- and high school students regularly visit these facilities as part of their history enrichment field trip, and scholars from all over the world have also paid their visit out of their interest on the subject. On November 9, 2011, however, it was announced that the Korean Department of Education's revised version of the middle school history textbook will no longer include any mention of the Gwangju Uprising. The public reaction to the announcement of the deletion have been vocal and negative, with newspapers claiming that the Department is trying to 'rewrite history' by excluding the history of democratization in South Korea from an official source.<sup>75</sup>

The public outside of Gwangju, on the other hand, stayed relatively unmoved by the controversial attempt at the textbook revision. The Gwangju-based *Chun Ji Newspaper* reported that the whole nation is outraged by the deletion of Gwangju from history textbooks, and goes on to quote opinions from people living in Seoul, Incheon, and other northern cities. One Incheon interviewee said, "If we start erasing our past like this, what will be left of our history?"<sup>76</sup> The article encourages the readers to take action by signing an online petition on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media being prepared by the city of Gwangju. The number of petitioners had reached 5,000 by November 16, one week after the announcement of the Department of Education.

The exact reason behind the proposed deletion is unclear, but several explanations have been proposed. The most immediate reason under speculation stems from the rivalries between

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<sup>74</sup> 'May 18 Memorial Cultural Center' Pamphlet.

<sup>75</sup> Yoon Bo-Mi. "Controversy over May 18 in Textbooks, An Attempt to Turn Back Time". *Interview 365*. November 14, 2011. Retrieved from <http://interview365.mk.co.kr/news/11435>.

<sup>76</sup> Lee HyunJung. "Online Petitions Take Off – What Will Be Left of History without May 18?" *Chun Ji Newspaper* on November 16, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.newscj.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=104334>.

the southwest and southeast regions, which translate into political competition between the two major parties. The media have pointed to President Lee Myung Bak and his Grand National Party for orchestrating and supporting the textbook revision movement. When questioned about the rationale for editing out the part of history that deals with Korean democratization, the response from the conservative party was that “we need to emphasize that we have a liberal democracy, because the North Korean regime, in essence, was a democratically elected government, which makes it difficult for us to call ourselves the same.”<sup>77</sup> The Grand National Party is arguing that the Korean society should deemphasize its history of democratization because that political system in itself bears too much resemblance to how the North Koreans freely elected to have a Communist regime.

Others also speculate that perhaps President Lee Myung Bak and his party want to hide the more graphic and violent part of modern history from the youth. President Lee had commented back in August of 2011 regarding the upcoming textbook edition that “learning should be fun, and fieldtrip-oriented”, and while the Gwangju Uprising certainly provides a bevy of memorial sites for classroom fieldtrips, it is not a particularly fun or upbeat topic.<sup>78</sup> It is interesting that the majority party is not making a better distinction between a democratically elected government and a dictatorial regime and instead is worrying about others making comparisons of North Korean communist regime with South Korean democratic government.

The public have been expressing dissatisfaction with the reasons that President Lee and his party have stated for their decision. Newspaper articles make constant comparisons of the current situation with Japan’s textbook scandals, recent stories which involve textbook editions which have claimed the Dok Island as part of Japanese territory. Some have speculated that the

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<sup>77</sup> Park Han Yong. “Baffling Ways to Identify a Commie in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” *OhmyNews*. January 24, 2012. Retrieved from [http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS\\_Web/view/at\\_pg.aspx?CNTN\\_CD=A0001687315](http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0001687315).

<sup>78</sup> “Baffling Ways to Identify a Commie in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” *OhmyNews*.

government is trying to clean up the nation's uglier past but point out that without a past, the nation is in danger of repeating the same kinds of mistakes. In an article written by the Millennium Party Congressman Kim Young Jin, he states that "Korea's history should be published and passed down exactly the way it appears in a mirror's reflection, and the Lee Myung Bak administration should revise their standards rather than our history."<sup>79</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Even after the completion of all the memorial projects and site renovations in Gwangju, the texture of memory is ever evolving. The recent efforts of the Department of Education to completely drop the topic of democratization and May 18 Gwangju Democratization Movement from the content of the middle school textbooks pose a threat to the myth at display at the Mangwol Cemetery. Rather than having to compete against a different version of the memory of the Gwangju Uprising, the myth of martyrdom is fighting against eradication from South Korean history books. The current controversial debate is an example of the struggles that accompany the preservation of a memory, and the conflict highlights the various factors that seem to contribute to the creation of a textured memory. The myth of martyrdom that has been built around the victims of the Gwangju Uprising owes its existence to President Kim Dae Jung. During his presidency, he actively promoted the movement of honorable treatment of the victims and enacted an act in 2002 which made the practice an official part of remembering May 18. The provisions of the act enabled the Mangwol Cemetery to be recognized as a national cemetery since the victims were now considered national patriots.

The Mangwol Cemetery is a memorial site that strives to frame the Gwangju Uprising as the genesis of modern Korean democratic history. The Bas-Reliefs, carved on stone pieces,

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<sup>79</sup> Kim Young Jin. "What Are You Afraid Of, Why Hide Our History?" *MediaToday* on November 15, 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.mediatoday.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=98459>.

provide visitors with a creative historiography of the spirit of independence and strength against oppression in Korean history. The assertion of the presentation of this art work is that the Gwangju Uprising is not unlike the Korean struggles in the 16<sup>th</sup> century against Japanese invasion, or again in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that as long as people keep the memory of it alive the spirit of independence will live on. Other art pieces and monument pieces found at this site emphasize that the Gwangju Uprising should not be forgotten, and that its significance lies in the successful democratization movement that followed. Written inscriptions will often say that there would be no democracy without Gwangju, and that if Gwangju is forgotten, democracy will soon follow.

There are factions of the South Korean society that do not share this belief about the meaning of the Gwangju Uprising for the democratization movement that took place in the latter part of the 1980s. Whether it is regionalism, conservative reservations, or a need to set South Korean political identity apart from North Korea's, there are groups that support the deletion of the Gwangju Uprising material from textbooks today. Although the deletion would occur only in middle school history textbooks, the implications of the revision cannot be ignored. While the monuments and other memorial sites in Gwangju will still continue to perpetuate a remembrance of the Gwangju Uprising, erasing the traces of the memory in an official material such as a textbook could do significant harm to the meaning of May 18 for the rest of the country outside of Gwangju. As the Gwangju Uprising approaches its 32<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary, the opposing visions of the memorial and their actors are utilizing the tangible against the intangible instruments of memorialization in order to gain a greater acceptance of their version within the vast, textured memory of May 18.

### Conclusion

The Gwangju Democratization Movement was brutally suppressed by the military under the leadership of Chun Doo Hwan. Students, workers, and citizens were killed in front of the city hall, at the downtown square, the park, at the university, and the major streets connecting the landmarks. Although the voices of the demonstrators were quieted in 1980, the survivors and witnesses of the uprising persistently demanded for the government to recognize the event for its significance in South Korean democracy and to address the abuses of the military government. Chun's regime initially did not recognize the Gwangju Uprising as anything but an incident staged by communist spies to destabilize South Korea, a dangerous riot that needed to be suppressed at all costs.

The evolution of the official terms used for May 18, 1980, reveals the development of the meaning and significance of the Gwangju Uprising for the South Koreans. Initially, the event was called an 'incident' or a 'chaos', and accordingly, the government did not make more than a minor report on Gwangju. By 1987, the first presidential elections took place and inaugurated Chun's protégé, Roh Tae Woo, as the first president of the Sixth Republic in the following year. The national restoration efforts of the memory of Gwangju Uprising benefited greatly from the momentum of democratic reforms that was in place at this time, and Gwangju Uprising received an official recognition as an instance of 'democratization movement' rather than North Korean infiltration or a chaos caused by gangsters. In 1995, the Kim Young Sam administration further elaborated on this definition by proclaiming that the importance of the Gwangju Democratization Movement derives from the modern South Korean belief in the value of democracy. What was



once overlooked as a minor incident in the southwestern city was now a crucial symbol of one of the main virtues at the core of the Sixth Republic.

The Kim Dae Jung administration which succeeded Kim Young Sam in 1998 completed the reconciliation of the Gwangju Uprising case by honoring the individuals, both deceased and living, who participated in the uprising. However, the years following the end of Kim's term have shown drastic decline in both the interest and the emphasis on commemoration of the Gwangju Democratization Movement. In a way, it appears as though some of the efforts of commemoration have become lost as recent attitudes reveal the non-regional citizens' disregard of the event as a strictly regional experience. The education committee announced on early November, 2011, that the contents regarding the May 18 Democratization Movement will be removed from all middle school textbooks. However, the contention concerning the memory of Gwangju in textbooks is a reminder that the Gwangju Uprising remains a politically charged and relevant memory for South Koreans today.

Furthermore, the history of the memory of Gwangju Uprising as it reemerged in South Korean politics throughout the past three decades paints a vivid picture of politics in a nation that, after WWII and the Korean War, had to rebuild itself. All the while, the backdrop of the Cold War shaped many key aspects of South Korean politics during the building phase of its democracy. While intimately tied with the US and economically and militarily dependent, the younger generation of South Koreans in the 1980s dreamed of economic and political independence of their nation in their near future. This demographic, and specifically individuals such as Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung who led the intellectuals, college students, professors, and workers at countless rallies, stands for the agency of South Korea in the democratization process. They understood the significance of the Gwangju Uprising, and even if they were not

on the streets of Gwangju on May 18, 1980, they helped revive the memory of Gwangju and made the uprising a relevant and crucial piece of South Korean democratization.

One of the most recent news concerning the Gwangju Uprising reveals how the South Korean public may feel about the significance of the historical memory. On the one hand, the current administration proposed to have contents related to the Gwangju Uprising removed from history textbooks. Thus far, most of the vocal oppositions of the deletion of Gwangju-related material in the textbooks had come from Gwangju citizens. On the other hand, in mid-March of 2012, just one month before the election for the House of Representatives, a nominee who had been chosen to run for a seat in the House of Representatives for one of the wealthiest districts of Seoul, was forced to quit his campaign when his party discovered a thesis he had written on the Gwangju Uprising for a conference in the United States back in 2010. Park Sang-II had called the uprising a 'popular revolt' and a 'communist rebellion', which drew instant backlash from the media when his thesis came to light.<sup>80</sup> The South Korean public condemned him for revising South Korean history of democratization by discounting the very centerpiece of the movement, and the Senuri Party promptly cancelled his nomination to represent the elite Gangnam district.

This particular instance shows how the Gwangju Uprising still remains a highly relevant topic in South Korean politics. In a way, the incident challenges Lee administration's stance that the Gwangju Uprising is a regional experience that has no place in the national history textbooks. It is fair to conclude that the memory of Gwangju Uprising is synonymous to South Korean democratization movement as it served as the genesis of the reform in many ways. It is not about the precise function of the Gwangju Uprising on May 18, 1980, in the grand scheme of South Korean history. Rather, the memory of the Gwangju Uprising emerged at such critical

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<sup>80</sup> Kyung-Won Kwon, "Nominations for the Kangnam Belt Cancelled," *Seoul Politics*, Mar.14, 2012. Translated by the author. Retrieved from <http://goo.gl/MfuFe>.

points in the history of South Korean democratization process and nation building that it is difficult to separate May 18 from the modern South Korean identity today. Gwangju Uprising may be a topic that makes reappearances in politics for this very reason, whether a political party deemphasizes it in South Korean history to strengthen its own legacy as may be the motivation of Lee administration or a politician may utilize Gwangju to gain favor with the constituents. One cannot affect or shape South Korean identity without discussing the Gwangju Uprising, as proven by the polar extremes of versions of the memory that have been presented by politicians today. The function of the memory of Gwangju Uprising may differ from one era to the next and is particular to the political aims of each of the actors. However, the study of the history of the memory of Gwangju Uprising makes one thing clear – the memory of the Gwangju Uprising was and always will be an indispensable piece of discourse in the nation's political machinery.

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