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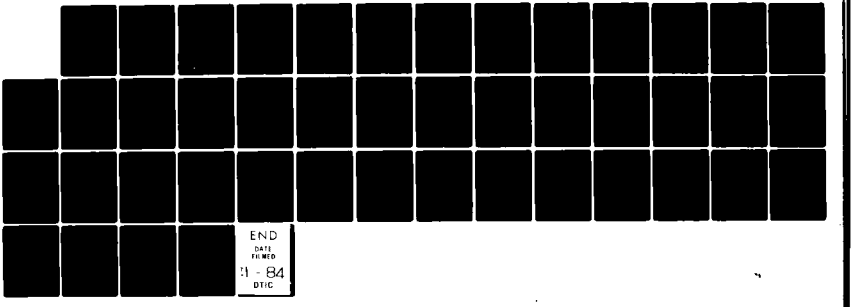

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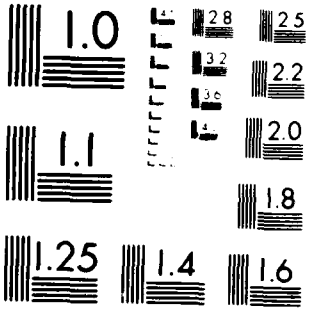
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STRATIFICATION, INTEGRATION AND CHALLENGES TO AUTHORITY IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH KOREA

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INTRODUCTION

Any effort to characterize an entire society or culture in a few pages is bound to be misleading. Making predictions on the basis of such a characterization is still more hazardous. Probably generalizations about Korea tend to be less simplistic and inaccurate if they are phrased in terms of contrasts. If we begin, therefore, by stating that Koreans are highly practical and intensely materialistic, it is also necessary to assert that they are moralistic and constantly concerned with the spiritual and ethical aspects of their changing condition, and that this concern is deeply rooted in tradition. History is taken seriously by most Koreans, not just as a prestigeous form of scholarly activity or as a backdrop to national pride, but also because it exemplifies the good qualities and faults of the Korean people. History (including the very recent past) reflects both virtue and the lack of it, among ordinary people as well as in high places. Popular concern with the ethical aspects of government is an important component of contemporary South Korean political culture.

History also illustrates highly practical lessons that have a profound influence on popular thinking. The long record of invasion and foreign occupation, culminating in the traumatic experience of the Korean War, has created a profound and widely shared anxiety at all levels of society about national security that lies just beneath the new, cocky, self-assurance. And in the nation's striving for economic development - particularly the desperate desire to catch up with Japan - there is a reaction against the record of hundreds of years

of extreme poverty and exploitation.

There has been much speculation among both Koreans and outsiders about the extent to which foreign cultural influences exerted throughout Korea's long history have been responsible for particular aspects of contemporary thought and behavior. What actually exists today is a highly complex cultural amalgam of influences from China, Japan, the United States and elsewhere combined with distinctive indigenous traits; new elements from overseas are constantly being adopted, rejected, or transformed. Often it appears that institutions, attitudes, and patterns of behavior are developing along the lines of Japanese models, and there has indeed been some tendency in this direction. But in general contemporary South Koreans are fiercely determined to follow their own distinctive path, and now that a non-Japanese speaking generation has taken over in most positions of authority, it can be expected that there will be fewer resemblances to Japan.

Since 1945 rapid, fundamental and sometimes violent change in all aspects of South Korean society and culture has been the norm. At the same time continuity with the past remains pervasive. Today there are a great many sophisticated, English-speaking Koreans who are skilled at interpreting their country to foreigners. Yet the outsider should usually beware of accepting such explanations uncritically, since they are likely to be one sided, either emphasizing continuity with the past and the heavy influence of Confucian traditions on the one hand, or stressing the degree of change and the extent to which old values and customs have been or are being cast aside on the other. One basic

challenge in trying to understand South Korea, then, lies in unravelling the combinations of change and continuity that pervade every aspect of contemporary society. What is uniquely Korean is rather the particular mix of these influences that prevails in any given institution, group, or individual - a mix that not only changes with time but also in accordance with such variables as generation, class, education, geographic region, and occupation.

The outside observer who tries to describe modern South Korea is also forced to take into account other kinds of socio-cultural oppositions or contrasts in addition to the continuity-change dimension. With a strong tradition of hierarchical social organization and respect for authority, accompanied by a preoccupation with rank, status, and correct role performance, Korean society has been correctly classified as "tightly structured". There is no question about who is in charge; behavior is reasonably predictable; orders are carried out; things get done. Yet at the same time, when confronted with a changing environment, Koreans show great flexibility and the ability to make relatively easy adaptations in structural arrangements. Authority is constantly being challenged, and the social order is sometimes in a state of nearly chaotic flux due to the determined striving for higher status by restless, ambitious individuals from below.

Any visitor to Korea is likely to be impressed with the intensity of group orientation in such contexts as the family, school, village, workplace, sports club, or political faction. Cheerful compliance with collective norms and the subordination of individual interests

to those of the group are deeply ingrained ethical principles that constrain behavior in many ways. But foreign observers from early historical times to the present have also consistently been impressed by the lively individuality and direct emotional self-expression that characterizes daily social interaction. Laughter, quarreling, intrigue, heroic personal ambition, and changing allegiances seem to be as frequently encountered as propriety, self restraint, collective consensus, and dedicated loyalty to superiors. Certainly such dualistic contrasts as that between excess and restraint exist everywhere. Also in Korea as elsewhere a fairly clear separation between formal and informal contexts and modes of behavior can be discerned. Nevertheless, many socio-cultural patterns in Korea retain a certain unpredictable resistance to categorization that seems particularly striking in comparison with those of Japan.

In what follows an effort is made first, to describe some aspects of the various sectors and strata in contemporary Korean society and secondly, to consider the question of national social integration. The inevitable tensions and discontinuities that accompany rapid social, economic, and political change are set against the apparently successful adaptation of millions of individuals to new occupations, new kinds of associations, and new life styles. It is generally recognized that the most direct and immediate cause of domestic political unrest today and the greatest challenge to political stability in the coming years is the student opposition movement. In addition there is considerable concern at the possibility of widespread worker protests during the

1980 s, either in the form of economic demands and work stoppages that might interfere with economic growth, or in the form of alliances with student groups to support political dissidence. The main emphasis will therefore be on these two sectors. In the final section there is a somewhat more speculative discussion of socio-political trends in the 1980 s.

Social Sectors and Stratification in Korean Society

In some respects the term, Social Sector, is preferable to that of class because neither class structure nor class consciousness is clearly defined in contemporary South Korea. Liberation from Japanese colonial rule, the land reform of 1949/50, social upheaval and large scale rapid industrialization have resulted in momentous shifts, both of geographic and occupational population distribution. A rapid decline of the farm population has taken place, from a peak of over 16 million (54% of total population) in 1966 to less than 11 million (about 30% of total population) in 1982. Correspondingly the number of industrial workers increased almost 4½ times between 1963 and 1981, while during the same period workers in the tertiary industrial sector (service, social overhead, and related occupations) increased about 3 times. The total population increase during the period 1966 to 1981 was about 10 million or 31%. Thus industrialization and urban growth - largely the result of massive rural-urban migration - have transformed millions of rural youth into industrial workers. This relatively youthful labor force (about two thirds of all workers are under 30 years old) is generally change and future-oriented, with ambitious aspirations for upward mobility.

As in other rapidly developing countries the increase in the size of the middle classes and the spread of middle class life styles and expectations throughout society is particularly marked. Large scale generational mobility, which is partly the result of the shift from rural to urban occupations, upheavals associated with the Korean

War, a great increase in the numbers of high school and college graduates, and the general rise in living standards all have contributed to a breakdown in traditional class distinctions. Unfortunately, good statistical data on stratification is not yet available.

If, however, we include the skilled blue collar elite, well-to-do farmers, and small entrepreneurs, along with clerical, professional, managerial, and other white collar occupations, over half of South Korea's total population of forty million people can be regarded as middle class. For Seoul alone the percentage rises to about 57%. Class, here, is defined both in terms of living standards and self perception. But members of the more traditional middle class do not always welcome the new-comers. For example, the fact that a skilled machinist or welder makes as much or more than a high school teacher is likely to be resented by the latter, who feels that the world is out of joint when higher education no longer commands greater status and rewards. In recent years shortages of skilled labor have pushed up wages significantly in many industries, and workers are quick to adopt a more luxurious standard of living. A gap remains, however, not only in levels of education, but also with regard to attitudes, tastes, and customs; and marriage patterns still tend to respect the more traditional lines of demarcation.

A distinctive feature of society has been the lack of organized interest groups, except for commercial and industrial associations. South Korean governments have been unwilling to tolerate any independent organizations, particularly those that might oppose existing policy on behalf of an occupational group such as teachers, farmers, or labor.

For the middle class this has meant the abdication of any public role for individuals, except that of government supporter, apathetic cynic, or subversive dissenter.

Koreans are celebrated for their obsessive concern with education, and in fact upward mobility is to a considerable extent dependent on educational qualifications. Another route to success does exist, however, in which individual merit and luck make up for the lack of education. Petty commerce and small scale entrepreneurship have led to economic security and higher status for many ambitious, hard-working people with relatively little schooling during the past twenty-five or thirty years. Occasionally such successful entrepreneurs have gained large fortunes. Possibly with the consolidation of the industrial system and the growth of giant corporate enterprise, such opportunities will decline, but so far, in contrast to the situation in many other developing countries, this sector of the urban economy has continued to thrive.

While social mobility has been extremely high during the past generation or so, largely as a result of increased educational opportunities and rural-urban migration, there is now evidence that this period of fundamental social change, rapid mobility, and fluctuating class boundaries may be coming to an end, and the outline of a more sharply stratified society is beginning to appear. It has already been pointed out that in most cases educational qualifications sharply limit a person's life chances. Those in middle class occupations are usually able to provide a superior education for their children, and by various other means such as extreme forms of parental encouragement in school

work or access to good jobs through the exploitation of personal networks, they are able to ensure the preservation of privilege. For those in the industrial, bureaucratic, military, or intellectual elites, the process is both more intense and more effective.

In general there is rather severe discrimination against blue collar workers in terms of status, opportunities for advancement, and monetary rewards, even though the income of low paid clerical workers may in some cases be significantly lower than that of the working class elite. Women make up another group that suffers discrimination, both in terms of access to jobs and because of unequal pay. But pressures for change are building steadily, both in the case of college-educated, middle class women as well as among female industrial workers.

One segment of the established middle class that has not been upwardly mobile in economic terms, in spite of its relatively high educational qualifications, is made up of writers, artists, some clergy, journalists, and many teachers. They are likely to be highly dissatisfied with their living standards and critical of those in authority. These groups along with university students, who also for the most part have few monetary resources, form the articulate core of political opposition to the Government.

Today most farmers in South Korea are well fed, well clothed, and well sheltered. Even landless agricultural laborers have a meager degree of economic security, provided there is a healthy laborer in the family. Well-off farmers (15-20% of the rural population) can send their children to college, take sight-seeing trips by bus and plane in

the slack season, and even invest in urban real estate. More significantly, farmers are investing a good part of their higher incomes in increased productivity by means of agricultural chemicals, pumps, machinery, vehicles, and greenhouses. Over 95% of villages are electrified, and nearly everyone in the countryside has a TV set. The houses of middle level farmers are also regularly equipped with radios, electric fans, electric irons, electric rice-cookers, wall clocks, and sewing machines, while the well-to-do also have stereo sets, refrigerators, and washing machines. In other words a revolutionary transformation of both farm productivity and of rural living standards has taken place since about 1972 as a result of higher grain subsidies, the increased availability of credit, more advanced agricultural technology, greater urban demand for food, and increased government investment in rural infrastructure. In addition farmers have improved their houses, village roads, bridges, and irrigation facilities through cooperative self-help projects undertaken as part of the New Community Movement (Saemaul Undong). The farm economy was hard hit by the combination of recession and high inflation in 1979-1981, but two bumper crop years (1982 and 1983) have improved the situation considerably.

The differences in income between "rich" and ordinary or poor farmers should perhaps not be given too much weight in sociological terms. Thanks to land reform Korean villages are relatively egalitarian communities compared to many other Asian countries. All farmers in South Korea are small farmers, and while absentee landlords do exist, they are usually close relatives of actual farm families, and their

holdings are not large. While well-off farmers have more possessions than their neighbors, they are likely to work just as hard or harder, share the same general life style, and participate intensively in the life of the community. They are also usually closely bound to their fellow villagers by ties of kinship, territorial association, and responsibility. An important aspect of the New Community Movement which was implemented energetically in the 1970's was the enlistment of the most successful farmers as leaders (both formal and informal) in promoting rural development. Also, as a result of a generation of large scale migration, whereby many of the poorest and the richest members of the agricultural population left for towns and cities, villages today are probably more cohesive and homogenous than in the past. Politically farmers are likely to be conservative and support government candidates at election time, although an exceptional situation exists in the Southwest, where traditional opposition to Seoul governments has been heavily reinforced by the Kwangju insurrection of 1980 and its bloody suppression by President Chun.

Korean farmers will confront some rather dramatic structural changes during the coming decade, as new government policies with regard to grain and fertilizer subsidies, farm size, and mechanization are put into effect. Almost certainly the farm population will continue to decline, but there is little reason to expect any important changes in the political orientation of those who remain on the land.

The military constitute an extremely important but little understood group in Korean society. A highly selective military elite,

including mainly graduates of the military academy, holds most of the military commands and a great number of influential positions in the bureaucracy, in semi-public corporations, and in the Democratic Justice Party. There is little question regarding the intelligence, competence, and dedication of such men, but opinion differs greatly concerning their attitudes and the roles they can be expected to play in the future.

According to one interpretation, their education and experience has been so narrowly intensive that they are incapable of understanding the sophisticated political problems involved in moving in the direction of a more pluralistic democratic state; their approach is simply to devise a strategy, give orders, and then insist that they be carried out. It is alleged that they are unwilling to entrust political rule to anyone else, although the job is too big for them to handle. Also, the association of the military leadership with repressive political policies is believed to have alienated them from the mass of Korean people, who want to see a program of greater compromise and moderation.

But there is also a quite different point of view: Nearly everyone has friends and relations in the military, and one often hears that members of the armed forces are as eager for progress towards more democratic institutions as anyone else. Most military officers have a regular civilian upbringing and college education while the vast majority of soldiers are draftees. Also, there are admirers who insist that just as in 1961 the military elite are the true modernizers and purifiers of Korean society. They are the relatively non-materialistic and uncorrupted element that holds things together and enables the technocrats

to function effectively. According to this perspective not only are the generals developmental activists, but also as military defenders of the country they deserve the grateful support and respect of all Koreans.

Some middle class urban Koreans might laugh at this idealized characterization. The unfavorable views of the Korean military that have been widely publicized by students, intellectuals, civil rights activists, members of the political opposition, and foreign correspondents, particularly since 1980, do, in fact find a certain resonance in Korean popular opinion. But in any kind of crisis there is likely to be little confidence in either the heroic idealism of students or the feeble, tainted liberalism of the political opposition. The military leadership provides a reserve of strength and unity for troubled times that most Koreans would not want to do without.

The Labor Movement

Interference in and control over labor organizations by the government for predominantly political purposes has been characteristic of South Korea since the country's independence in 1948. Workers have had little experience in running their own unions or in participating in collective bargaining. Traditional ideas about interpersonal relationships have persisted in the workplace in spite of rapid industrialization. It is expected that the worker will be deferential, obedient, and dependent, while the employer's role is paternalistic. Ideally his paternalism should be benevolent, and factory owners and managers invariably describe their administration in such terms, emphasizing their constant concern for the workers' welfare and morale. According to most observers of the labor scene, employers, particularly in small and medium industry, have tended to take advantage of this 'family' model (sometimes called the Confucian model) of company organization in order to keep wages low and resist any worker demands for codified rights and privileges.

In spite of the atmosphere of strict political control under the Park regime a sizable labor union movement developed on the basis of labor laws promulgated in 1961. Union membership increased from just under 100,000 in 1961 to about 1,100,000 in 1979. Although the unions were weak and unable to act forcefully on behalf of their members' interests, particularly during the Yushin period from 1972-1979 when the right to strike was virtually abrogated, nevertheless they were able to represent workers in periodic wage negotiations and the

presentation of grievances to management. A considerable number of union officials acquired extensive experience in organizing and representing workers, and determined efforts were made to educate the rank and file.

Just before and after President Park's assassination in 1979 there was a good deal of labor unrest, despite substantial wage increases during the late 1970s. In any case the new Chun Doo Hwan Government took quick action in 1980, completely revising the labor laws in order to deprive organized labor of whatever small residual power it possessed. In addition to the usual political considerations domestic labor peace was regarded by the technocrats as an essential condition for the resumption of rapid industrial growth. Today unions have virtually no useful functions to perform,* and union membership has declined by about 20%. An elaborate bureaucratic mechanism has been established for handling labor disputes, by means of which the government is legally able to prevent strikes or any kind of massive interruption of work. In addition, in order to promote cooperation and harmony between workers and employers (within the philosophical context of the family model previously referred to) a 1980 law requires that labor management councils must be established in all firms with more than 100 workers.** The Labor Management Councils (LMC) are supposed to foster a continuing dialogue through regular meetings between workers' elected delegates and an equal number of management

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* Theoretically unions can still engage in collective bargaining, but in practice wages are determined by government and management decisions.

** Fifty or more employees, if the firm has any record of a labor dispute within the previous three years.

representatives, including the head of the firm. The general idea is to promote a mood of harmony and cooperation, while providing an opportunity for the expression of worker grievances. What has actually happened is that in most cases uneducated, inexperienced, and unorganized workers have been at an enormous disadvantage in dealing with experienced management representatives. Employers, who initially opposed the system, now find it generally useful as a means of by-passing the union where one exists, and as a way of attaining their objectives without making concessions.

In firms where management is progressive and labor relations are good, the LMC have proved useful in promoting a dialogue and settling minor problems as they arise. Where workers feel their grievances are being heard and dealt with justly, morale and a sense of participation in the firm is augmented.

In most firms, however, it appears that management has used the LMC to impose its demands for higher productivity, longer hours, or changed work rules, while no action is taken concerning worker grievances. One female textile worker commented in June, 1983 as follows: "The LMC system is indeed just like the Confucian family. The Employer - just like the father - does all the talking, makes all the demands, and will not tolerate any opposition or difference of opinion. He exploits the worker, who is expected to be grateful, coming early and staying late without complaint".

There is now widespread recognition, even among many government officials that labor legislation is too restrictive. In most firms the LMC procedure is not working well, and worker resentment and bitterness

is reported to be increasing. At the same time there is considerable bureaucratic resistance to the idea of revising the labor laws on the grounds that 3 years is too short a time for trying out and rejecting a new system.

Employers like the present set-up, which gives them virtual immunity from organized union activity and allows them to deal with individual workers' delegates who have no real organizational support, either from the company union or from the national Federation of Korean Trade Unions. The very large corporations (Chaebol), which account for most of industrial production, have for the most part succeeded with government support in remaining unorganized. They maintain that their relatively high salaries and welfare benefits make unions unnecessary. Since 1980, then, even more than previously, it has been possible for employers to take advantage of the Chun government's anti-union bias to conduct their labor policies pretty much as they please.

Critics of the labor scene in South Korea generally agree in listing the main problems and abuses: 1) The traditional, autocratic, hierarchical orientation of employers has not been changed as a result of rapid industrialization. Rather, it has been reinforced. There is little separation between ownership and management in Korean industry, and efforts to promote workers' rights or worker participation in management are regarded as an encroachment on the right of private property. 2) The government does not play an even-handed role, mediating between labor and management. Rather, it consistantly restricts and controls union activity. Also, the Ministry of Labor Affairs is passive

in its supervision of the Labor Management Councils, so that worker grievances are ignored. 3) Workers are not granted the rewards of increased productivity. 4) There is a marked discrimination in wages against blue collar workers and women.

Given the worker's inability to strike, to organize effectively for collective bargaining, or to obtain any positive action in response to his day-by-day grievances, the implication naturally is that labor unrest is imminent. Certainly violent incidents, often resembling riots more than labor disputes, have occurred on several occasions. And there have been frequent predictions to the effect that long-suppressed discontent is bound to break out with explosive force.

Actually, in the short run there does not seem to be any real prospect of severe labor trouble in South Korea. There is some discontent and a feeling of worker frustration in many plants, but the possibility of organized opposition and work stoppages is not great. There is little sense of blue collar solidarity. Workers, except perhaps for resigned unskilled laborers in small and medium companies, tend to be optimistic, with expectations of steadily improving conditions for themselves and their children. The recent severe recession is over, unemployment is declining, and real wages have gone up. There is recognition of the sacrifices made by many firms (under strong government pressure) in keeping employees on the payroll despite disastrous declines in orders. Improvements in welfare provisions, particularly health insurance, have made a significant impact on labor morale. Also, the working man is likely to be reasonably well informed about the highly competitive world

market for South Korea's exports, and he is therefore receptive to the barrage of indoctrination from officials and management concerning the need for dedicated hard work and for restraint in making demands that raise costs.

Most workers do not seem to have a strong sense of personal injustice, either with regard to paternalistic management practices or the division of wealth. Upward mobility is still predominantly a function of merit - hard work and austerity - in the popular view. There is an acquiescence to the 'family model' of labor-management relations that is profoundly frustrating to outside organizers who try to promote union activism. Actually, today there is little opportunity for the expression of discontent with the present system. Controls in most plants are reportedly very tight, so that trouble-makers are quickly isolated either by management or by the police. Working families have a lot more to lose now than in the past if their jobs are disrupted, so that as economic growth resumes and living standards improve, however slightly, they are less ready to join in opposing the system. Appeals to patriotism, additional welfare benefits, and modest real wage increases should suffice to keep labor in line during the next few years. The issue of labor rights, particularly the right to organize independently and negotiate with management on an equal basis is not an immediate, major concern. Labor unions have never been an effective instrument for improving the condition of South Korean workers. The large conglomerates, which are not unionized, are the pace setters for wages, working conditions, and welfare benefits.

Possibly the most discontented workers, those among whom labor problems are most likely to arise, are women. In the textile industry almost 90% of the workers are female, while in clothing, shoes, and electronics the proportion is also high. But the vast majority of these young women only plan to work for five or six years or even less before marriage, and their major concern is to save as much money as possible during that period. On the one hand the relatively temporary nature of their employment and the evident exploitation of their situation by management has made them susceptible to the organizing efforts of members of the United Industrial Mission (UIM). But on the other hand they are unlikely to have any long term interest in reforming the system, and for the time being, at least, no better jobs are available. With the virtually complete supression of the UIM, labor disputes among women workers have ceased.

While concern over labor unrest and the inflationary impact of wage increases is undoubtedly of paramount importance in official thinking, there is also a widespread and genuine desire to find a Korean solution to labor problems that will promote social justice in accordance with traditional institutions and values. It is argued that the effort to impose Western models of labor union organization has been a failure, and that a system emphasizing collective spirit within the firm, reciprocal obligations between labor and management, and the mutual benefits of working together without conflict is more congenial to the Korean mentality and more in keeping with custom. At the same time there appears to be strong resistance to the adoption of the Japanese

model' on nationalistic grounds. One frequently hears such remarks as, "Koreans are much too individualistic to develop that kind of submissive dedication to the company".

On the other hand the confrontational model of labor-management relations and union organization based on collective bargaining is not without its proponents. Union officials and many academic observers insist that if only the government would take an impartial position, guaranteeing the rights of both sides, labor and management would be able to work out their differences in an equitable manner, which in the long run would lead to a healthier economy and improved labor-management relations.

With the development and consolidation of South Korea's industrial system, changes in small and medium industry - where the most oppressive labor conditions now exist - can be expected. Family ownership will probably be increasingly diluted as more firms go public, and management practices will become more regularized and impersonal. It also seems certain, in the light of recent scandals and countermeasures, that larger amounts of credit will continue to be made available on a more regular basis. Whether such changes will result in better wages and/or improved working conditions, narrowing the existing gap between small and large firms, probably depends more on the supply of labor and on government policies than on union activity or the benevolent instincts of managers.

Government support of employers at the expense of workers' interests is beginning to be something of a national scandal. Presumably once the immediate economic crisis is past, political concern with eroding

popular support among workers will dictate a more even-handed policy.

Today controls are so tight that there is virtually no means of expression - no safety valve - for worker discontent. Recent history has shown that the most violent labor disputes usually arise from relatively irrational and emotional problems involving personal insult, corruption, or a sense of personal mistreatment, rather than because of broadly based discontent over wages, working conditions, or restrictions on the right to organize. It is possible that the thoroughgoing suppression of what might be called a legitimate labor movement has raised the stakes to the point where emotionally charged riots such as occurred at a Hyundae shipyard in 1974, or at Sabuk, a coal mine, in 1980 could trigger a whole series of explosive incidents.

The wage increases this spring show sensitivity on the part of the government to working class opinion, while the current propaganda line promoting labor-management cooperation and denouncing confrontation is probably widely accepted as being in everyone's best interest. But higher educational levels, improved living standards and more knowledge of labor movements in other countries will inevitably raise the consciousness and aspirations of Korean workers. In a few years the South Korean Government will be faced with the necessity of either moderating its stand in the direction of permitting (perhaps even encouraging) the development of a more representative labor movement on the one hand, or of intensifying the already high degree of repressive control to the point where conflict is inevitable on the other. Granted that the eventual form of labor organization will be distinctively Korean,

embodying systems of relationships that are culturally congenial, the blatantly autocratic paternalism existing today can not be maintained indefinitely.

The Student Subculture

Korean students are proud of their continuing role as the "nation's conscience", earned over a period of sixty years or so through determined, often heroic political opposition to authoritarian rule - both Japanese and domestic. But since the Kwangju insurrection of 1980 and President Chun's subsequent rise to power there has been a fairly drastic change in student goals. Previously, their opposition took the form of radical reformism - within the boundaries of conventional political ideology - the passionate desire for "good government" in terms of both Confucian and Democratic ideals. Recently, however, there has been a marked shift among activist student leaders to the left, resulting in a revolutionary, anti-United States, pro-Communist stance. Well organised links have been established with leftist groups in Japan which in turn are in touch with North Korea. Thus leadership of the student movement has taken on a much more clandestine and subversive aspect than existed previously.

Even aside from the ideologically committed activists the great mass of students is considerably more disaffected than in the past. It is generally believed that only about 5% of students can be classed as radical activists, but estimates (by students and professors) of the number of sympathetic onlookers range from 50% to 70%. Thus, only about 20%-30% of students are regarded as apathetic or supportive of the regime, compared to estimates of from 40% to 60% a few years ago, while the number of those who strongly sympathise with the radical student leadership has increased. Students say there is nothing in contemporary society to admire or to attach themselves to. They have contempt for the entire

establishment - military, political, bureaucratic, industrial and academic. Professors are distrusted and disliked as the "bourgeois agents" of the Korean Military, who are in turn regarded as agents of American imperialism. Professors complain that student extremism is so great that reasoned constructive dialogue is no longer possible, since there is no moderate, intellectual middle ground where discussion can take place. Students are either polite and deferential, hiding their real feelings, or they are openly resentful and suspicious, but in either case professors say they are unable to make any intellectual contact. The result in many cases is that they no longer make an effort, simply going through the mechanical motions of teaching without either commitment or any sense of accomplishment; accordingly, faculty morale is low.

A number of other non-ideological factors contribute to student discontent. The Chun government's scheme for making university students study harder (and engage less in political dissent) has been to require that 30% of all enrolled students be failed and expelled annually. The result has been some reluctance on the part of students to enter schools with high standards or to study difficult subjects, while many of those who are not doing well in their studies and expect to fail are drawn into the activist camp.* The program has added an element of anxiety and coercion to campus life that is deeply resented.

The strictly enforced ban on private tutoring for high school students (designed to make admission to elite universities more egalitarian)

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* Recently (August, 1983) the rule has been moderated to enable failed students to transfer to other departments or to repeat a year's work.

has deprived students from less affluent families of their main source of financial support while in college, and many have had to drop out for lack of funds. Finally, students at private universities, where tuitions are high and classrooms are extremely crowded, complain that they are being exploited by greedy and irresponsible administrative officials. The large numbers of police, plain clothes government agents, and, when demonstrations break out, officially inspired hoodlums (*chimsei*), who are constantly visible on or near campuses, tend to contribute to a siege mentality on the part of students.

Radical students take pride in their well-organized secret networks, which are used for recruiting and indoctrinating freshmen as well as for organizing anti-administration demonstrations. Efforts by the police to infiltrate and break up such networks have resulted in an intensification of their clandestine nature. The real leaders, mainly former professors and students who have been expelled for radical activity, reportedly live under cover off-campus. Close personal bonds are established between upper classmen and incoming freshmen, who are gradually indoctrinated through intensive "leadership training" sessions conducted during vacations in rural areas. There is a satisfying and daring excitement for freshmen in being exposed to subversive literature and in being admitted to a secret organization in which each individual knows only his own immediate superior. In general the activists are good students from poor family backgrounds.

Intellectually the student movement continues to reflect Korea's elitist, hierarchical, and authoritarian educational traditions. There

is no diversity of viewpoint or alternative interpretation; one complete theoretical scheme explains everything. Students accept such models as, for example, dependency theory without question, and any discussion is merely a matter of filling in the gaps with details. Once they have learned and accepted the single over-arching thesis, they refuse, according to professors, even to consider practical objections that contradict the theory. In general, activists come from the departments of sociology, history, religion, economics, and literature, while students of mathematics and the natural sciences are relatively apathetic.

The cohesive structure of the radical student subculture is also based on traditional factors. Both emotion and obligation are involved in the small group loyalties and close but hierarchically differentiated ties between upper and lower classmen. The predilection for accepting absolutely one correct ideological answer that explains all difficult problems has already been mentioned. The result is bound to be increasing socio-cultural isolation for students within South Korean society. Until recently nearly all Korean students, no matter how violent their opposition to the establishment might have been during the university years, adopted conventional social roles after graduation. Today there is considerable concern that the intense indoctrination and bitter opposition of activists while on campus will lead to an increase in the numbers of permanently alienated and subversive intellectuals.

There is really no way of knowing whether the intensification of student ideology, which combines radical leftist sentiments with rightist nationalism, will continue. Is a permanent shift to a new

intellectual tradition underway, or is this simply a stage in the evolution of modern Korean society? The strong emotional bonds of comradeship among the embattled students together with their sophisticated and durable structures for recruiting and indoctrinating new members would seem to indicate that it is more than a temporary phenomenon.

Compromise and reconciliation on the part of the government has become much more difficult because of the similarity between the theoretical stance of students and that of the DPRK. Korea is viewed by both as a <u>comprador</u> society in which no real progressive change is possible until American troops and political influences are eliminated, while the present government is regarded as the betrayer of true Korean nationalism. From the standpoint of President Chun and his military advisers, this is treason. Opposition political leaders in South Korea do not want to be associated in any way with such radical ideas, which have almost no popular support outside universities except among a small group of intellectuals.

Accordingly the new radical extremism, while worrisome because of its increased potential for subversion, and because of its more strident anti-American tone, has probably weakened the capacity of the student movement to lead or trigger any large scale expression of political opposition. Without extensive popular support the students must remain a separate, isolated campus subculture, and the administration has amply demonstrated its ability to contain their actions within this context.

Integration and Disintegration

South Korea has come through a long period of political turmoil and continuous, wrenching social and economic change in remarkably good shape. There are plenty of areas of tension, such as conflicts of values and patterns of behavior, institutional lags, the generation gap, an inequitable distribution of the material rewards of development, and severe restraints on popular self expression and political participation. But by and large it can be said that the sociological adaptation to rapid change has been successful. A majority of the population is optimistic and welcomes further change in the expectation that it means continuing improvement. Except among a relatively small group of dissatisfied urban intellectuals and some conservative (usually older) elements of the rural population there is little resistance to the adoption of new attitudes and life styles. University students, while denouncing many aspects of the new urban/industrial civilization that is developing in South Korea, are among the first to follow the changing fashions.

Despite the persistence of traditional values, harsh political restraints, and the domination of economic life by a few giant corporate conglomerates, Korean society is remarkably open. Although the gap between rich and poor has been increasing since the late 1960s, the division of wealth in South Korea is still quite equitable (roughly similar to that in the United States). Social and geographic mobility are high, reflecting the restless, exuberant, achievement motivation that is widely characteristic of Koreans. In the pursuit of success,

personal connections can still be very useful, particularly in gaining initial access to various kinds of opportunity, but solid, long-term achievement based on individual merit is a much more essential requirement. Both demonstrated competence in academic study and personal qualifications are necessary. Thanks to recent reforms, children from low income families can now compete in the great educational arena on more even terms, and there is no question but that they will take advantage of their improved chances. For a country where institutions and traditional values are structured according to strict and pervasive hierarchical principles, the amount of brash, disrespectful egalitarianism can be breath-taking; there seems to be a constant ambivalence between respect for authority and the desire to undermine it. In any case there are no real barriers to upward mobility except lack of education and possibly, in some cases, regional prejudice.

Although very significant changes have taken place in traditional family structure, ideology and behavior, the kind of impairment or breakdown in family functions that might lead to disorganization or alienation has certainly not occurred. The structural cohesiveness and emotional solidarity of both the nuclear family and larger groups of relations remain as a secure base and refuge for Koreans in their rapidly changing world.

Millions of individuals, brought up in small, cohesive rural communities where they knew everyone and where behavior was highly predictable, have adjusted without great difficulty to the impersonal, anonymous, and contractual relationships of one of the world's largest

cities. Various kinds of solidary groups within the city of a recreational, educational, occupational, territorial, or economic nature seem to be able to provide the necessary companionship and sense of communal identity. There has also been a gradual and continuing shift from primary emphasis on parochial loyalties to a sense of proud participation in a national community. The New Community Movement has been particularly instrumental in promoting this shift in rural areas.

Koreans frequently complain that they are losing their traditional value system without acquiring a new set of moral principles in its place. To the foreign observer, however, there appears to be a great deal of continuity--a solid base of social ethics derived from Confucian doctrine that regulates personal relationships and rules of behavior in an effective but no longer rigid manner.

The lack of strong political ideology in South Korea has also been a matter for criticism, particularly by intellectuals both here and abroad. Actually, it has been a blessing. Policy has not been constrained by emotional attachment to philosophical principles. Hard-headed, experimental empiricism combined with a growing self-confidence and patriotism have served the country well. Korean governments have consistently adopted a flexible, trial-and-error approach, both in introducing new policies and in attempting to fine-tune the results of change. "If it works, use it; if it doesn't work, discard it", has been a kind of unwritten maxim among the responsible bureaucratic elite. More traditional, status-quo-oriented officials have had to adapt or suffer damage to their reputations.

Economists tend to be optimistic about the prospects for continued high rates of growth due to the existence of a plentiful supply of educated, disciplined, and still fairly cheap labor under the direction of skilled and experienced managers. The next problem to be confronted is the move to a higher technology in order to stay ahead of the industrializing countries with cheaper labor. Although there is discussion of the problem as a coming "crisis", no one really doubts that the Korean educational system is up to the job, or that aggressive entrepreneurship with governmental support will acquire the necessary new knowledge.

Patriotic nationalism has been mentioned above as an element of strength and integration in South Korea. Certainly there has been great pride in the country's economic accomplishments and a sense of profound satisfaction at the ability to engage successfully in world competition. On the other hand the repressive, authoritarian policies of both Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan have had a profoundly divisive effect on public opinion resulting in ambivalent attitudes towards authority. Currently there is widespread cynicism and mistrust of the Chun government, both because of its illegal seizure of power, and because it appears determined to hang on to it in much the same manner as President Park, at least until 1988.

With the exception of students most people passively accept authoritarian rule, because they are used to it, because they have no choice, because they perceive no better alternative, and because they have too much to lose - too large a stake in continued order and stability. But there is little enthusiastic support, and many of the

more articulate and creative sectors of society are discontented and alienated.

Even nationalism has become a matter of controversy, as the debate over dependency theory and reunification widens, and popular attitudes towards the United States become more ambivalent. Last year the older generation was profoundly shocked by the degree of sympathy expressed by young people for those who set fire to an American Cultural Center. Never before had there been any serious consideration of reunification on North Korean terms, i.e., the removal of U.S. troops and the replacement of the Chun Government; yet that is what many student groups are now advocating. Anti-Americanism or, in milder terms, a new spirit of independence vis-a-vis the United States is certainly becoming more widespread, not only among intellectuals and radical youth groups, but also among businessmen, bureaucrats, and the military. Perhaps given South Korea's stage of development, it is surprising that dependent and worshipful attitudes prevailed for so long. In any case a new element of uncertainty and tension exists in feelings about the United States. South Koreans were profoundly disillusioned by President Carter's effort to withdraw American forces, and the recent U.S. protectionism in trade negotiations is felt as a kind of violation of trust. When times are good, confidence in the country's new economic and diplomatic strength and a nationalistic determination to forge ahead regardless of American policy are frequently expressed themes. But when crises occur, feelings of dependency are revived, and the nation again looks anxiously to Washington for support. Incidentally,

a somewhat similar phenomenon takes place in connection with popular attitudes towards the ROK Government. Whenever there is a perception of national danger, opposition fades, and there is a rallying of support for the regime in power.

Currently the Chun government is trying to promote a national patriotic ideology on the basis of the New Community Movement, which started out in the early 1970s as a strategy for rural development. So far, despite an energetic campaign under the leadership of the President's younger brother, there is little evidence of any real response among the urban population.

Probably the area of most serious malintegration today in terms of its potential for instability, lies not so much in the general ideological opposition between proponents of more democratization and the government's technocratic authoritarianism, as in the direct confrontation and irreconcilable differences between radical student groups and the authorities. The pattern in South Korea has been that repression breeds greater dissent which in turn engenders more severe repression. The students can not acquire political power, but they can disrupt the government's exercise of it. Presumably the pressures generated by this confrontation could intensify until at some point in the 1980s the competence of the regime to maintain domestic order and guarantee national security might be called into question. In other words, there could be greater risk in a continuation of the policy of suppressing dissent than in trying something else.

Certainly today there is increasing scepticism regarding the Chun government in conservative business circles, and as pointed out earlier, widespread disenchantment exists elsewhere. Of course, a resumption of rapid growth and the consequent prosperity could do a great deal to legitimize the government, but there is nevertheless a widespread feeling in Seoul that continuation of present tight controls and the heavy handed repression of dissent is unthinkable for the long run. A comparison is frequently made with the late 1970s under President Park and the weeks of rioting and civil disturbance that preceded his assassination. It is pointed out that even in a period of nearly full employment and relatively high living standards popular resentment in the Kyongsangdo area (which had been particularly favored economically under Park) had reached explosive proportions by 1979. A typical conclusion might be, "There is no way in the world that Chun Doo Hwan can continue similar policies as long as Park did without provoking an equally drastic or even stronger reaction; and it won't take 19 years".

The problem for the government, of course, is to try to gauge the reaction of students and other opposition groups if compromises are made and controls are relaxed. Many others in addition to the ruling elite are bothered by the question, "Will gradual orderly progress towards democratization of the political process and free expression of opinion take place, or will there be insistent demands for immediate revolutionary change in existing structures that might endanger national security and interfere with economic development?". The capacity of contemporary South Koreans for social discipline in such a situation is

unknown. In previous periods of upheaval when there was an absence of centralized control, moderation and self restraint have not always been predominant. Military commanders are convinced that the political opposition, which presumably would win in an open, impartial election, dangerously underestimates the threat from the North. Given the precedent of two military coups-d'etats in 1961 and 1979/80, further military intervention can be expected if the democratization process should get out of hand.

Considering all these possibilities, the present 'go slow' policies of President Chun are understandable. His problem is that in order to gain a greater measure of legitimacy and popular support, he must make significant political concessions without losing control. Given current popular attitudes and the hard line of student leaders this may be very hard to do.

On the other hand, despite their opposition to military authoritarian governments, the mass of Koreans can be regarded as moderate, anti-communist conservatives. There is no question but that if forced to choose, they would prefer order, stability, and security to democratic freedom with political chaos. Whenever violent dissent appears to be leading to a breakdown of order, popular support is likely to swing back to a strong leader. Anxiety about national survival and a preoccupation with material progress are still dominant factors in determining public opinion.

As a result of nearly twenty years of rapid economic development two contrasting modes of thought or ways of looking at the contemporary

world can be discerned as co-existing in a kind of uneasy balance, often within the same person. On the one hand nearly everyone seems to share to some extent a striving, energetic activism - an eagerness to seize the new economic opportunities and a delight in the new materialistic rewards. People envy, admire, and aspire to the opulent life style of the new-rich. They even pay a kind of grudging deference to the ruthlessness cunning, and amoral pragmatism that seems to be required in order to achieve success.

But on the other hand there is also a great deal of thoughtful questioning about the quality of contemporary life and about where the country is headed. This kind of soul-searching is most articulately expressed among the educated urban middle class, but it can be just as strong among workers, particularly those who have migrated from cohesive farm villages where traditional values and patterns of behavior still govern everyday life. The older generation may regret the weakening of community and kinship solidarity and complain about the lack of propriety and ethics among youth. Young people condemn the obsession with materialistic goals and the lack of idealism that seems to them to characterize national policy.

Government protection and support for developing industry has been an important ingredient in South Korea's economic success, but the process of "creative entrepreneurship" has produced an increasing concentration of wealth, even though the country is still relatively egalitarian by Asian standards. Many of the newly successful are not only very wealthy, they also tend to flaunt their wealth in a kind of

competitively extravagant life style that makes a startling contrast with the pinched austerity of most people's lives. Admiration of the rich and powerful is tempered by the widespread conviction that their success was achieved through collusion with the bureaucracy and other kinds of shady practices. In a very small and very crowded country, the issue of the fairness of distribution of wealth underlies much of the dissatisfaction that seems as prevalent as the optimistic ebullience described earlier. In its efforts to acquire greater popular support and legitimacy through a program of "social and economic justice" the Chun government has announced as part of the 5th Five Year Plan (1982-1986) the adoption of welfare policies involving a substantial redistribution of national income. While some implementation has already taken place, particularly in the areas of housing and health insurance, it remains to be seen during the next few years how great a budgetary commitment will actually be made. The Fifth Five Year Plan (1982-1986) is being extensively revised, and it seems probable that some of the originally projected welfare expenditures will be curtailed.

So far the technocrats who run the administration have generally been able to impose their will on business and industry, but there is a question as to who will be ruling whom in a few years. Big business is just now starting to flex its political muscles, and some observers believe it is just a matter of time until the conglomerates take over as a dominant influence on policy formation. In this connection parallels are frequently drawn with the situation in Japan. Also, there is some concern both in bureaucratic and academic circles that progress towards

democratization, accompanied by the weakening of centralized government controls, will further enable the commercial and industrial elites to concentrate wealth and power in their own hands.

Another, related controversial issue that gets a lot of critical attention from student groups, intellectuals, and other elements of the political opposition, is the degree of emphasis on economic growth embodied in governmental planning. Many people feel strongly that the rewards to business under present policies are disproportionate and that greater investment in welfare, environmental protection, and education is urgently required. There is increasing emphasis on the "quality of life" as opposed to merely piling up larger quantities of consumer goods. It is probably safe to say, however, that low-income and rural elements of the population are less concerned about such matters than the better educated urban middle class. Also, in spite of the questioning and criticism there is a kind of unquestioned national commitment to growth policies as a result of the accomplishments of the last two decades. Koreans know very well that their country has little capital and few natural resources, and that increases in wealth depend eventually on success in a highly competitive international market place. Thus the debate about how income is to be distributed is inevitably subordinated to the paramount question of how South Korea can increase its foreign exchange earnings and continue to attract foreign investment.

Trends and Prospects

In discussing the future, my effort will be more here to consider the possible effects of such political trends as the death of Kim Il Sung or dramatic changes in the policy of the U.S. or the USSR towards the Korean peninsula.

Looking at Korean society today, one must conclude that while there is plenty of stress, malintegration, and dissatisfaction, most people are gratified by the progress made in recent years and look forward to continued improvement in their situation. In a period of rapid growth certain social sectors inevitably obtain a smaller share than others of the increasing economic pie. So far the most articulate (writers, artists, journalists, and other intellectuals working in the humanities) and the least articulate (semi-skilled and unskilled workers and poor farmers) are the groups that have been neglected. But their discontent does not yet present a significant challenge to authority. There is widespread dislike and distrust of the government, but there is no conceivable alternative group or program with a significant degree of popular support. And if improvement in the world economic situation permits South Korea to resume the interrupted process of rapid growth, as appears likely,* President Chun's administration will undoubtedly benefit in terms of increased popularity and legitimacy. Thus, within a continuing context of tight political controls on dissident activity and the continuing fear of aggression from the North, large scale social unrest during the

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*See Far Eastern Economic Review article, "Recovery is Confirmed", April 7, 1983, pp. 100-102.

next few years is unlikely.

If, on the other hand the international economic environment turns sour, with higher oil prices and more protectionism against Korean exports, the prospects for internal stability would be [illegible]. According to KDI, [illegible] new jobs must be created annually (a GNP growth rate of about 6%) to prevent increases in unemployment. And there is always the specter of trying to manage a [illegible] billion dollar external debt, if exports should decline.

Looking further ahead to 1985 and beyond, it seems fairly certain that without substantial concessions domestic political opposition to Chun's regime (or to that of a hand picked military successor) will gain strength, even with continued economic growth. National unity, discipline, and self restraint under authoritarian rule are justified domestically by the threat of military aggression from the [illegible]. When this threat [illegible], an essential element of [illegible] political culture will have been radically altered.

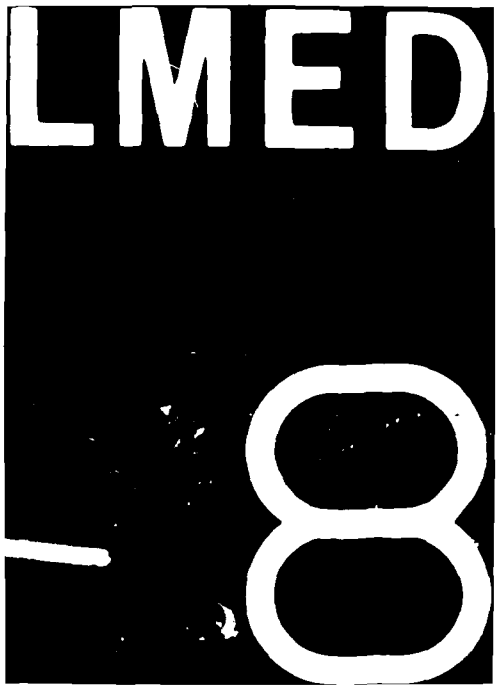
The other intangible factor that will become increasingly important is the growing impatience on the part of an increasingly well educated, politically sophisticated and internationally minded population with drastic restraints on the free expression of ideas and the development of democratic political institutions. So far Chun's nationalism has remained undiluted by any significant compromises. On the contrary, cosmetic gestures have been accompanied by a tightening of controls. At some point soon the accommodation process must begin. And when it does, can the reaction be contained? Or will Chun eventually become

the prisoner of hard line elements in his government as Park was?

First steps towards an alliance between student agitators and labor are now being taken, and while there is no immediate prospect of unified action, the terrifying (for the government) possibility always exists of some sort of combined action in a future political crisis. On the other hand there is the strong possibility alluded to earlier that student extremism will be a self-isolating process, and that as a result the legitimacy and influence of students in their role of 'national conscience' will diminish.

In trying to gauge South Korean prospects for continued orderly peaceful development, great weight must be placed on the desire of the large (and increasing) middle class to safeguard what it has gained and pursue its goals for the future. In contrast to this stabilizing influence, however, there is always an element of unpredictable emotional volatility that could combine with deep popular aspirations for more democratic rule to create widespread social unrest. Before 1980 most people thought that if massive popular demonstrations resulted in bloodshed, the authorities would be completely discredited and unable to govern, as had occurred in 1960. But the events of 1980 proved them wrong. Now the question is, how much blood has to be shed, and does it have to be in Seoul, in order to dislodge the present regime? For the time being, at least, no challenges of the necessary magnitude, either from students or from labor appear likely. During the next few years, then, we must assume that leadership is going to continue to be authoritarian, that the bureaucracy is going to continue to be powerful

and high-handed, and that individual human rights are going to be of relatively minor importance. What we're really interested in is whether President Chun makes concessions skillfully enough to satisfy the Korean people and keep the system functioning effectively - not the extent to which the ROK is moving towards convergence with Western democracy.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