

THESIS

CHUN DOO HWAN'S MANIPULATION OF
THE KWANGJU POPULAR UPRISING

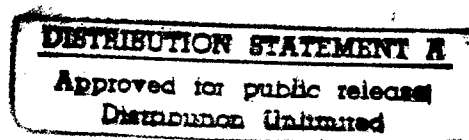
DONALD G. SOHN

1998

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CHUN DOO HWAN'S MANIPULATION OF THE KWANGJU
POPULAR UPRISING



A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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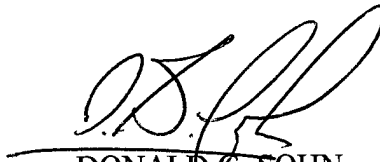
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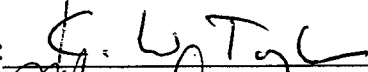
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ABSTRACT

Many scholars and journalists point to the tragic events that occurred in the Kwangju Popular Uprising as a pronounced materialization of the dependent nature of the relationship between U.S. and South Korea. However, this position ignores that perceptions of American complicity in the Kwangju tragedy were constructed and molded by the personal greed and ambition of Chun Doo Hwan's military regime, which effectively censored the media and intelligence agencies reporting from South Korea. This regime used the media to construct the viewpoint that the U.S. was only interested in the stability of the region, and that the U.S. actively supported the actions of the new regime. Chun's regime frequently excluded and distorted U.S. official statements to further amplify this misconstrued image. In addition, Chun removed all personnel affiliated with the liaison channels of the Korean government and replaced them with people loyal to him. In other words, he effectively controlled all intelligence, diplomatic, and military communication channels and proceeded to manipulate the Carter administration into viewing Korea from a perspective advantageous to serve his own political purposes. Media censorship had a profound effect on the Korean general public and the control of intelligence outflow led to distorted decision-making processes in Washington. Consequently, the failure of the U.S. to escape manipulation by the Chun regime reached its peak during the Kwangju massacre, which can be directly attributed to the rise in anti-Americanism. Reasons for this failure include: (1) The near absolute censorship of the Korean media by the military regime of Chun Doo Hwan and the resulting inability of the U.S. government

to convey its view to the Korean people; (2) the virtual inability of the U.S. to glean any useful intelligence, and its consequent failure to anticipate or understand the subtleties of the internal domestic politics of South Korea following the demise of President Park Chung Hee; (3) the inconsistency of U.S. government policy, which included both the vocal and idealistic "human rights" diplomacy of the Carter administration and the conservatively "realistic" anti-Communist alliance policy of the Reagan administration, which coincided with Chun's rise to power. Subsequently the issues of the past, such as the unconstitutional takeover by the South Korean military and the brutalities of the Kwangju incident, were quietly buried, spreading increased discontent among democratic activists regarding U.S. policy in Korea.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Donald G. Sohn was born in Hornell, New York on November 29, 1962. His education crisscrossed between the United States and South Korea until the age of twelve. He graduated from Saint John's High School in Shrewsbury, MA in 1981 and in 1986 graduated from the University of California at Los Angeles with a BA in International Relations. He also was named Distinguished Military Graduate and received his commission as a second lieutenant in the United States Army. Since 1987, he has continuously been on active duty in various positions including Intelligence officer for the 1/27th Infantry Battalion, Company Commander of an Army Signal Intelligence Unit, Liaison officer at the U.S. Embassy in Seoul, and Personnel Administrator on the staff of the Combined Forces Command in Korea. CPT Sohn has graduated from the Intelligence Officer Advanced course, Combined Army Staff School and is airborne and ranger qualified. In 1996, he entered Cornell University's Asian Studies program to obtain a broader based knowledge of East Asia prior to his next assignment as a Foreign Area Officer in the Far East. He is married to the former Jennifer Roh of Long Beach, California and has two children, Michelle and Clayton.

To my mother and father.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would not be possible had the U.S. Army not given me the opportunity and partial funding to study at Cornell University. I would also like to express my appreciation to my committee members, Professor Keith Taylor and Professor Victor Koschmann, who made valuable comments. I am also thankful to Professor David McCann for introducing Korean studies to me and providing me with the primary source for this thesis, the Cherokee files.

To my wife Jennifer, I am truly grateful for putting up with me and taking care of our daughter Michelle and our son Clayton, who are two lovely, remarkable and resilient children.

I thank Jesus Christ my Lord and savior who has guided me and blessed me despite my shortcomings.

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CHAPTER ONE:

Background

The U.S. and Korean government's inability to foresee and prevent the December 12, 1979 putsch led by Chun Doo Hwan became the Achilles' heel for any hopes for democracy in Korea. This watershed event allowed Chun to consolidate his military power base and sequentially rise to the presidency in August 1980. An infamous step taken by Chun to ascend to the presidency was the brutal suppression of the Kwangju Popular Uprising in May 1980, responsible for hundreds, if not thousands of Korean deaths. On February 24, 1993, Kim Young Sam became the first civilian president inaugurated in over thirty years, paving the way for the trial and subsequent death sentence of Chun Doo Hwan on August 26, 1996 on the charges of treason. This so called, "trial of the century" brought back to the forefront much of the smoldering bitterness felt by the Koreans, and creating a renewal of interest and suspicion as to the role of the U.S. government, if any, regarding the events in Kwangju. Mr. Yu Sang Duk a visiting professor at Cornell University and Vice President of the Korean Teachers Union wrote, "After the Kwangju Massacre and the completely unexpected revelation of U.S. involvement, the South Korean people realized that U.S. foreign policy did not necessarily support them. Anti-U.S. sentiment began to appear among members of the anti-imperialist and anti-monopoly movements first articulated by students and young intellectuals; this stance was eventually adopted by most social movements."¹

¹ Sang Duk Yu, Korea Briefing: Towards Reunification, published in cooperation with the Asia Society pg. 76. Also taken from lectures by Professor David McCann.

In the spring of 1980, a new group of military leaders reclaimed power from an interim civilian government. South Korean democratic roots were still at an incipient stage and were not strong enough to prevent the emergence of another military government. Although formal leadership change took place in 1980, the assassination of Park Chung Hee in October 1979 created a power vacuum, which precipitated the power struggle, led by General Chun Doo Hwan, who capitalized on this incident and basically controlled the government despite mounting popular aspirations for democratic politics. The finalizing event which consolidated Chun's ascent to power was the relentless suppression of the Kwangju popular uprising. A hotly debated issue has been what, if any, role the U.S. played in the Kwangju Popular Uprising, which took place from May 18 to 27, 1980.

When demonstrations against the new martial-law decree occurred in Kwangju, instead of using riot police Chun sent black-beret clad special warfare soldiers to put down the demonstrators. The soldiers indiscriminately beat and bayoneted demonstrators and spectators. Shocked and outraged, citizens who were neutral prior to these brutalities joined the student demonstrators. The combined forces broke into police stations, where they obtained firearms, and proceeded to drive out the military troops and control Kwangju City. After negotiations failed, Chun sent in regular Army units to retake the city, an action which led, by official count, to 191 civilian deaths, and unofficially to as many as 2,000 dead, with many more injured or missing.²

² Cumings Bruce, Divided Korea: United Future?, Headline Series, Foreign Policy Association, pg. 45.

Many scholars and journalists point to the tragic events that occurred in the Kwangju Uprising as the major cause of increased anti-Americanism. A renowned Korea scholar, who may be viewed as revisionist, Professor Bruce Cumings opines that the superpowers should have withdrawn from Korea after liberation in 1945. This would have allowed Korea to experience her own "social revolution" in place of the Korean War. He describes the United States as an imperialist nation that arrived after the Japanese surrender, not to liberate but to occupy Korea. Subsequently, the Korean War, which originated as a civil war between factions within Korea, expanded in to an international war between superpowers over control of the region. His reexamination of Korean history claims that the decision to divide Korea into U.S. and Soviet occupation zones in 1945 was taken without any Korean input and that the U.S. occupation in the South was violent. Indeed, its repercussions are still being felt today. He maintains that the continued American support of right-wing military dictators is consistent with its Korean policy, whose main objective has been to maximize American national interests rather than to promote democratic development in South Korea. Consequently, the previous sense of Korean gratitude was falsely manufactured and reinforced by the United States and its Korean collaborators.

Therefore, the rise of anti-Americanism was an inevitable consequence of the imperialistic structure of domination and the American endorsement of a forceful suppression of the Kwangju uprising was a pronounced materialization of the imperialistic nature of the relationship.³ With this line of

³ Cumings, Bruce, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1997, pg. 382.

reasoning, Cumings tries to re-interpret and re-write the history of Korean-United States relations and to re-educate the general public in his publications *The Origins of the Korean War, Vol. I and II* and *Korea's Place in the Sun, A Modern History*. Indeed, Cumings has gone so far as to state "With fifty years of hindsight or even five, in 1950 we can imagine a cauterizing fire that would have settled Korea's multitude of social and political problems caused by the pressure cooker of colonial rule and instant 'liberation,' a purifying upheaval that might have been pretty awful, but nothing like the millions of lives lost in 1950-1953, or the thousands in the April Revolution of 1960 or the Kwangju Rebellion of 1980." Cumings continues, "Had the Americans and the Russians quit Korea, a leftist regime would have taken over quickly, and it would have been a revolutionary nationalist government, that over time, would have moderated and rejoined the world community-as did China, as Vietnam is doing today. But we have to imagine this, because Americans do not understand the point of social revolutions, never having one themselves..."⁴

His basic premise is that the Kwangju Uprising, brought to the surface deeply rooted anti-Americanism not just from radicals, but from across the spectrum of Korean society. Cumings asks, "why did not the United States not act against Chun's violations of the joint command, not once but twice, in December 1979 and May 1980?" He answers that it is because, postwar Korean society, its political institutions, and its economic framework have

⁴ Ibid. Pg. 199.

been planned and shaped by the United States mainly to serve American interests.⁵

The central problem of Cuming's argument is his posing of the negative interpretation of the United States by the Korean people as a pre-given and unchallenged fact. This position ignores that perceptions of truth can be constructed and molded by personal greed and ambition through effective censorship of the media and misleading intelligence reports. The former can have profound effects on the general public and the latter in decision-making processes in Washington. Donald Clark illustrates this point from a Korean perspective, "Most Koreans regard the long-standing involvement of the U.S. in their affairs as the result of deep feeling Americans have toward them. They cannot believe that after almost five decades of military, political, and economic entanglement with South Korea, most Americans can hardly find it on the map. It is most disillusioning to learn the truth, that Korea is only one of many such American involvements abroad, most of which are similarly remote from the daily concerns of the American people. A certain bitterness naturally follows."⁶

The U.S. is the sole global superpower and because Korea relies heavily on the U.S. for exporting its goods and receiving military assistance, it is clearly in a dependent relationship with the U.S. Korea does not pose a military threat like the old Soviet Union or possess any substantial amounts of valuable resources such as, Saudi Arabia's oil fields. In that sense, South

⁵ Ibid. pg.'s 382-385.

⁶ Clark, Donald Bitter Friendship: Understanding Anti-Americanism in South Korea, Korea Briefing, 1991, Westview Press, pg. 152, 1991.

Korea from an American perspective has a very low priority in the U.S. security policy hierarchy, which leads to a low interest in collecting intelligence. Therefore, it stands to reason the U.S. does not devote large amounts of intelligence-gathering assets to develop broad expertise on Korea, and thus is vulnerable to manipulation. During my five years working in Korea within the Combined Forces Command and U.S. Embassy, I noticed that Washington receives its Human Intelligence (HUMINT the oldest form of intelligence collection, derived from operatives in the field) from only a few places, namely, the Ambassador, the CIA station chief, and the CINC.⁷ In South Korea, these three offices function as collection points for intelligence from their field agents. The field agents in turn, who for the most part are not fluent in the Korean language, rely heavily upon their official Korean translators when meeting with sources for information. This flow of Human Intelligence is quite susceptible, ineffective and dangerous due to the inability of the U.S. to independently reconfirm this type of intelligence with high-tech signal intelligence, measurement and signature intelligence, and imagery intelligence, which are primarily targeted against North Korea. Thus, during times of domestic crisis, when time is of the essence, a strategically placed Korean source can and does exert disproportionate amount of influence on what becomes the next U.S. policy stance. While the U.S. is renowned for its proficiency in the use of collection systems using advanced technology – SIGINT, IMINT, and MASINT. The US's HUMINT program has been less

⁷ The Directorate of Operations within the CIA is principally responsible for clandestine HUMINT collection; Defense Intelligence Agency, the State Department, and the military services contribute extensively to HUMINT.

than stellar, for example, most of the Cubans whom the CIA recruited during the Cold War were actually double agents working for Cuban intelligence. Similarly, former CIA agent Aldrich Ames sold names of assets providing intelligence to the CIA led to the death of a number of individuals at the hands of the Soviets.⁸ Therefore, given the lackluster history of U.S. HUMINT, critics' of HUMINT charge that the U.S. official establishment in Korea allows itself be used to promote the fortunes of internal Korean factions. Given this vulnerability, Cumings fails to account for the processes of communication, i.e., Chun's complete control over intelligence reports, military and diplomatic networks and Chun's control of the media, which were used as instruments to mold the Carter administration's opinion in support of Chun's policies and to reinforce Chun's political legitimacy to the Korean people.

The question of American involvement in Kwangju arises from the widely held belief that the U.S. endorsed the use of force in the bloody suppression of the civilian uprising, thereby igniting the flames of anti-Americanism in South Korea. Unfortunately, their works focus almost exclusively on the decision of the United States to support General Chun Doo Hwan by allowing Korean troops under United States command to be deployed to Kwangju. Attention given by articles to this oversimplified aspect of United States relations with South Korea was usually one sided. Among such issues were the following: why did both the U.S. embassy and the U.S. military command learn of the initial violent and brutal repression of

⁸ National Defense University. *Strategic Assessment 1996: Elements of U.S. Power.*

the peaceful demonstrators by the Korean Special Warfare units after the crucial damage was done? Secondly, how did the perception of the U.S. as a symbol of democracy and human rights become inverted among the Korean reformists, who saw the U.S. as a co-conspirator with the repressive Chun regime?

First, a brief explanation of the military institutional structure is in order. Since the Korean War in 1950, operational control (OPCON) of all U.S. and Republic of Korea (ROK) forces in wartime has been in the hands of a U.S. Commander-in-Chief (usually referred to as the CINC). This arrangement has been modified slightly to create the Combined Forces Command (CFC) in 1978, its sole mission is defense against external attack. The CFC, whose commander is an American officer and whose Deputy Commander is a Korean officer, is subordinate to a binational Military Committee headed by the Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Republic of Korea and the United States. Each nation places certain selected units under the Operational Control (OPCON) of the Commander-in-Chief (CINC/CFC), but retains the national right of command, including the right to remove units from CFC OPCON upon notification. In the event of notification, the CFC Commander can neither approve nor disapprove, but can only point out the effect such removal might have on the CFC's mission of external defense. Thus, in theory ROK forces (especially first echelon units) cannot be deployed outside of their area of operations without the CINC's approval. In fact, however, the Republic of Korea's military (ROKs) can remove units from the CFC at will merely by notifying the U.S. CINC and then doing it. There is no provision in the binational agreement that would allow the U.S. CINC to refuse to comply with the ROK government's decision.

Chun and his cronies defied this structure during the 12/12 putsch (December 12 1979) by removing ROK divisions off the front lines in order to take control of the capital, and giving official notification to the CINC only after the fact on the afternoon of December 13.⁹ Following the same modus operandi, Chun deployed ROK Special Warfare troops to Kwangju that were not under the operational control of the CINC, and took advantage of a loophole by choosing not to reveal the utilization of these troops to the U.S. However, as the incident escalated Chun could no longer contain the uprising solely with the Special Warfare troops and began his misinformation campaign to gain concurrence from the U.S. to deploy the ROK's 20th Division, which was under CINC's control to Kwangju. Special Warfare troops are primarily trained for military operations in enemy-held, enemy controlled or politically sensitive territories; in other words, Special Warfare soldiers were never trained for use in riot control against student demonstrators. One of the missions of Special Forces (SF) is to influence the emotions, motives, and behavior of opposing organizations so as to make them more favorable towards the ROK government. However, these ROK SF troops violated the boundary of human decency by utilizing their unconventional warfare training against their own countrymen. Abuse of their training led to adopt unacceptable and provocative tactics toward students, apparently including bayoneting pregnant mothers and raping high school students.¹⁰ These

⁹ Clark, Donald Bitter Friendship: Understanding Anti-Americanism in South Korea, Korea Briefing, 1991, Westview Press, pg. 148-149, 1991.

¹⁰ Kim, Young Taek Ten Days of a Journalists Coverage, Four Seasons Press, pg. 118, 1988.

actions were purposely taken to overwhelm the dissension and subdue the resistance of the demonstrators. However the SF grossly underestimated the fighting spirit of the people of Kwangju, which led to an escalation of violence and killing. Chun, who previously commanded this particular Special Forces unit sought the successful suppression of Kwangju as an essential step in consolidating his control over South Korea. In the aftermath, it was widely perceived by the South Koreans that the U.S. did nothing to stop his unconstitutional rise to power. Consequently, the Korean public strongly perceived that in order to preserve American strategic and economic advantage in Korea, U.S. realpolitik sided with the authoritarian regime of Chun Doo Hwan, despite Chun's abuse of human rights and the widespread fear and hatred of him by Koreans.

CHAPTER TWO:

Manipulation of Intelligence

President Park Chung Hee did not have a succession plan and the existing authority structure, which was centered on the president, the KCIA director, and the Presidential Security Force chief, totally collapsed on the evening of the assassination of Park, thereby creating a political vacuum. No political figure could wield power over the military, essentially making the military an independent institution separate from political control. Choi Kyu Ha, who had been Prime Minister, became the acting president and subsequently was elected president by the National Conference on Unification according to the existing constitution on December 6 1979. Choi had neither a political base nor a military background; he was a career bureaucrat who held posts such as National Security Advisor, Foreign Minister, and finally Prime minister.

Choi tried to balance conciliatory reform that the public demanded, with regained control by the increasingly hard-line military officers. This middle of the road stance resulted in Choi becoming isolated from the ruling camp of the National Assembly, further weakening the power of his fledging administration.

On December 12th 1979, Chun led a coup within the military and succeeded in the first phase of his master plan. The plan was undertaken during December 12th's violent clash between forces loyal to hard-liner, Major General Chun Doo Hwan, and those loyal to General Chong Sung Hwa, who attempted to work with interim President Choi to restore the prestige and confidence of the military. Chun masterminded the plan and took several

thousands troops from the area between Seoul and the Demilitarized Zone (leaving the DMZ vulnerable to attack from the North Korea) and instead used them to attack several strategic key command posts, including the Martial Law Commanders Headquarters. The attacking force included over 6,000 Special Forces of the ROK army's Ninth Division which was commanded by none other than General Roh Tae Woo (Chun's successor). Chun later described the 12/12 putsch as an action necessary to get to the bottom of the assassination of President Park and to eliminate corruption in the military. During the investigation, General Chong Sung Hwa was accused of complicity in the assassination of President Park Chun Hee and was later sentenced to twenty years in prison, but released citing health reasons after serving only a few years. On December 18 the new military leaders unequivocally stated that the fundamental mission of the military was defense and that politics was beyond the boundary of military service.¹¹

Chun removed all personnel affiliated with the liaison channels of the Korean government and replaced them with people loyal to him. By doing this, he effectively controlled all communication channels and proceeded to manipulate the Carter administration into viewing Korea from a perspective advantageous to his own political purposes. Thus, Chun's coup, carried out within six weeks of Park's assassination, made the unstable relationship with the U.S. even more precarious due to the void created in political, diplomatic and military communication channels. The net effect was to isolate Ambassador Gleysteen, U.S. CIA station chief Bob Brewster, and Combined

¹¹ Democracy in South Korea: A Promise Unfulfilled. Prepared by the International League For Human Rights, April 1985. Pg. 26.

Forces Commander General Wickham from their regular access channels. They could not learn from either the political or military communities of the ROK government who was in charge of the government. This isolation greatly reduced U.S. intelligence gathering capabilities within the domestic politics of South Korea. The following excerpt from a secret cable dated December 13th, 1979, from Ambassador Gleysteen to Secretary of State Vance, accurately described the situation: "General Wickham, Bob Brewster and I will work out a program of people to see and things to say to them. None of us looks forward with relish to this prospect because we all have been associated during the last six weeks with this type of missionary work and so much of it seems washed down the drain."¹²

The first and most direct communication channel was abruptly terminated by Park's assassination on October 26th 1979. The U.S. had viewed its relations with South Korea almost exclusively as relations with the person of Park with the last bulwark of anti-communism in East Asia. The Carter administration, although often in sharp disagreement regarding Human Rights with the Park regime, did pay careful attention to Park's view as relayed to Ambassador Gleysteen in official meetings. Since Park had ruled Korea for the preceding 18 years his abrupt demise created a power vacuum, seriously crippling the long-term relationship between the U.S. and Korea.

Secondly, when Park's assassin, KCIA Chief Kim Jae Kyu, was promptly arrested, his removal effectively cut the CIA (American) and KCIA communication channels. In addition, the KCIA after Park's death had become largely ineffective, owing to the fact that its director had assassinated

¹² Ibid., dated December 13, 1979.

the president, which allowed its competitor, the Military Security Commanding Agency (MSCA) headed by Chun to become the center of intelligence flow. Kim Jae Kyu had been thought by many CIA officials to be a moderate voice, one that contrasted with Park's totalitarian policies and thereby allowed a supplemental channel of communication to influence Korean policies. Kim Jae Kyu "was a man I admired very much," said Donald J. Gregg, who was the CIA Station Chief in Seoul from 1973 to 1975 and later served as U.S. Ambassador to Seoul under President Bush. During his days as station chief, Mr. Gregg said, he worked closely with Mr. Kim and liked to play golf with him. At the time, Mr. Gregg said, the KCIA director was "trying to help change the KCIA from the polemical agency it was under Lee Hu-Rak (former KCIA Director) to a more professional organization." Mr. Kim, he said, "seemed to be quite a moderate, he was very open."¹³ Ambassador Gleysteen and other officials frequently met with Mr. Kim to convey U.S. disapproval of President Park's policies. This is evident in a secret telegram dated 19 March 1979, in which Ambassador Gleysteen summarizes a meeting between President Park and Assistant Secretary Holbrooke: "Following up his blunt conversation on human rights with KCIA Director (Kim Jae Kyu), Holbrooke emphasized that even though these decisions were ROK internal matter they would nevertheless affect our future relationship."¹⁴

Ever since the U.S. and the Soviet Union divided Korea in 1945 and the U.S. Army occupied the South, the military has been one of the primary

¹³Shorrock, Tim, The U.S. Role in Korea in 1979 and 1980, pg. 14.

¹⁴ Cherokee Files, Cable dated March 19, 1979.

players in relations between Washington and Seoul. Therefore, when Chun forced forty senior general officers, several of whom had close relationships with U.S. General John Wickham, into retirement (ostensibly to make room for deserving junior officers)¹⁵, it totally isolated the U.S. military from any meaningful communication with the ROK military. This action severed the last of the three major channels of communication between Washington and Seoul, thereby insulating Chun from the eyes and ears of the Carter administration in Korea, Ambassador Gleysteen and General Wickham.

Once Chun successfully broke down all three traditional interaction networks, it was much easier for him to mislead and manipulate the Carter administration. In Tim Shorrock's article "The U.S. Role in Korea in 1979 and 1980", he asks, "why American officials had received incomplete and distorted information supplied by the State Department during the Kwangju incident." He correctly concludes that the answer lay in the sources used by the State Department. After reading the Cherokee files, it seems clear to me that Chun was in firm control after the Dec 12 coup, and that he had carefully planned this misinformation campaign to secure his political aspirations and power. After the coup, Chun visited both Ambassador William Gleysteen and Combined Forces Command Commander in Chief General John Wickham. Chun indicated that he had no political ambitions and he was "going to clean up the corruption, after which they (the military) would return to the barracks."¹⁶

¹⁵ Chun also black listed 5,000 politicians.

¹⁶ Peterson, Mark. The Kwangju Uprising: Shadows Over the Regime in South Korea. Westview Press 1988. Pg.'s. 57-58.

By spring of 1980, the U.S. began to slowly recover from the total break down of information and succeeded in re-establishing new informal and formal intelligence network ties. The new flow of intelligence indicated that Chun was actually enlarging his power base and had no intention to relinquish his current prominent status and return to the proper subordinate role of the military. Consequently, Chun realized it would only be a matter of time before the Carter administration would protest and question the legitimacy of Chun's methods. This led Chun to recall the favorite Cold War rhetoric of an imminent North Korean attack to not only to gain time from the U.S., but to tighten the reins of control over any pockets of resistance remaining in South Korea. On May 13th 1980, General Chun met with General Wickham and ominously warned North Korea was the hidden hand behind the current student demonstrations, and that the decisive moment for an attack on the South might be at hand. The Carter administration consumed valuable time and resources in re-directing the intelligence agencies to confirm or deny these "new intelligence estimates" (to dismiss these warnings as groundless, without investigating them would be unthinkable). Responding to this assessment, after consulting with U.S. intelligence, the State Department press spokesman stated: "From our information we see no movement of troops in North Korea out of the usual and we see no movement which would lead us to believe that some sort of attack upon the South is imminent."¹⁷

¹⁷ United States Government Statement on the Events in Kwangju, June 19, 1989.

Undeterred, Chun attempted a different avenue of approach by raising U.S. concerns regarding the internal stability of South Korea. Chun sent former Chief of Staff of the Combined Forces Command General Yoo Byoung Hyun and former Defense Minister Lee Chong Boo (who at the time held the rank of colonel) on several secret missions to Washington. This was an unabashed and direct attempt to lobby conservative active and retired military general officers that Chun had known from previous assignments. These couriers of Chun tried to persuade the general officers that Korea could be the next major ally after Iran to fall into the hands of radicals, if the did not support Chun. They emphasized Chun as the only man who had the proper credentials and military backing who could bring stability to Korea.¹⁸ One of the targeted general officers was former Combined Forces Commander (CINC) General Richard G. Stilwell, who was explicitly mentioned in a cable, dated May 3 1980, from the Secretary of State's office to U.S. Ambassador Gleysteen in Korea. General Stilwell was an ardent critic of President Carter, especially after Carter recalled Major General John K. Singlaub from his position in Korea after Singlaub criticized Carter's U.S. troop withdrawal policy, and it appeared in the Washington Post.¹⁹ Stilwell emphasized that air and naval forces could not replace the deterrent function of the Second Division because for an effective deterrence, he said, "the deterring forces must be positioned between the enemy and any logical objective."²⁰

¹⁸ Translated from Shin Dong Ah magazine, April 1996 issue. PPG's 126-128.

¹⁹ For more information on the Singlaub Affair see Time vol. 109, June 6 1977 pg. 29.

²⁰ Newsweek, June 6, 1977 pg. 51.

The cable states: " An immediate concern is a trip to Korea which we understand General Stilwell will make in the next ten days. We will try to talk to Stilwell before his departure, but we are informed that he has already discounted present U.S. policy to the Korean generals mentioned above (Choi Kyong Nok and Johnny Sohn), and has led them to interpret present policy just as a "State Department" ploy which can be bypassed or turned around.

Stilwell's trip to Korea is being arranged entirely through [Blacked Out], General Sohn, and we presume General Chun has a hand therein.

In addition to our effort to talk with Stilwell here, I hope you will be able to make contact with him there and that either you or General Wickham will be able to persuade him of the fundamental importance of our present posture and the parallel importance that the ROK military not receive conflicting interpretations from which they will typically choose the most congenial. Newsom"²¹

In addition, anticipating that Ronald Reagan would win the 1980 elections,²² Chun directly lobbied the Republican Party. How much money was contributed and how much influence it bought is not known, but it is interesting to note that Chun Doo Hwan was the first foreign head of state to be received by President Ronald Reagan at the White House.

Chun, who was the acting Director of the KCIA and the head of Military Security Commanding Agency, was keeping close tabs on the activities in Washington. The intelligence he received from his agents indicated Carter's foreign policies were under heavy popular criticism for the

²¹ Cherokee Files, cable dated May 3, 1980.

²² Translated from Shin Dong Ah magazine, April 1996 issue. Pg.'s 126-128.

failure to prevent the ouster of the Shah from Iran²³, and for the inability to take decisive action of any kind against the Soviets who had recently invaded Afghanistan.²⁴ Less than two weeks after the tumultuous events of Chun's coup, the Soviets attacked Afghanistan on Dec. 27, 1979, in the first use of its forces outside of its own satellite empire since World War II. The invasion dramatically transformed the entire security balance of the Persian Gulf region. The fall of the Shah had removed a large pillar of U.S. security policy in the region and had stimulated plans for a more active U.S. military presence in defense of U.S. interests. Chun realized that the opportunity to secure the presidency of South Korea was very near at hand. To accelerate his plan and optimize his chances of grabbing complete power, he needed one last huge destabilizing incident, short of war. This incident was the Kwangju massacre in which he sacrificed hundreds, if not thousands of lives, to promote his image as a strong and capable leader who was not afraid to crack some eggs to make an omelet.

²³ "Iran dominated the critical last years of Jimmy Carter's presidency and contributed substantially to his electoral defeat. His determination personally to see this crisis through to completion went far beyond his executive responsibilities. It was, in a very real sense, his crisis. Throughout his long last year in office, it had dominated his thoughts, like an infuriating but endlessly fascinating puzzle. He had wept, prayed, sweated and cursed over it." Quote from Gary Sick, principal White House aide for Iran on the National Security staff.

²⁴ Sick, Gary. All Fall Down. Random House, Inc., 1985. Pg. 240-242.

Biographical Sketch of Chun Doo Hwan and Hana-Hwe

For a rather obscure Major General in the South Korean Army to rise to the presidency of South Korea within a span of a year is an impressive feat. More phenomenal was his ability not only to suppress U.S. influences in Korea, but also to manipulate U.S. policy while clearly being in a militarily and economically dependent relationship. Thus, a brief biographical sketch that includes his military training, leadership ability, and relationship with the late President Park may help us better understand his thought processes and grand strategy.

Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo and approximately 200 officers, all graduates of the Korean Military Academy and from the Kyongsan Province, were members of a key organization called "Hana-Hwe". Hana means unified into one, Hwe means an association or society, thus loosely translated to mean an "association with (ostensibly) the united goals of patriotic duty to their country." I imagine the initial ideals and motivation of forming Hana-Hwe came from the historically revered "Hwa-Rang" knights of Silla (400-918 AD), soldiers who looked upon their military service as an honor and privilege, rather than a burdensome duty. In fact, at the entrance to the Korean Military Academy (KMA) there is a huge boulder with the words "Hwa Rang" inscribed on it. This is not an attempt to compare the esteemed "Hwa-Rang" warriors to those members of "Hana-Hwe", but only to give a historical reference to how this association may have come to adopt the name. In any case, an astute student of Korean history would be quick to point out that both Chun and Roh violated at least one of the "five secular injunctions"

laid down in the early 600's by the famed Buddhist monk Won'gwang, that is to "refrain from wanton killing."²⁵

Hana-Hwe, a secret organization that had initially been backed by former President Park, began receiving the attention of the KCIA in 1969. KCIA dismissed the significance of the organization due to the low rank structure of its members and the backing of the organization by President Park. However, in 1973, Hana-Hwe was officially dissolved after Park began to suspect it's members were backing a private faction headed by Major General Yun Pil Yong, Comander of the Seoul Metropolitan Garrison. Despite the dissolution, members continued to maintain close relationships and remained virtually intact.²⁶ By 1988 former members of Hana-Hwe produced two presidents of South Korea, fifty plus general officers, and eighteen national assembly members, and held numerous minister positions during the Chun and Roh presidencies.

Chun's KMA graduating class of 1955 is usually referred to as the 11th class to graduate from the academy, however this is a misnomer because his class actually was the first to graduate from a regular four-year curriculum (not surprisingly, closely patterned after West Point). All previous so-called upper classmen had graduated from two-year junior colleges, Japanese military academies, or three-month Officer Candidate Schools with low admission standards. In contrast, the entrance requirements for the first KMA class were very competitive due to the ongoing Korean War; for every

²⁵ Lee, Ki-Taek. A New History of Korea. Harvard University Press, 1984. Pg. 55.

²⁶ Lee Jong Gak, Je 5 Gonghwagukeui Buri: Hana-Hwe (Roots of the 5th Republic: Hana-Hwe), Shin Dong-Ah, no.1, 1988, pg. 314.

seven applicants only one was accepted. Approximately half of the entering class was from the enlisted ranks of the Korean Army, seeking reprieve from the Korean War. They included, Chun Doo Hwan, Roh Tae Woo, and Chung Ho Young (who later became the commander of the 7th Special Forces Regiment that was responsible for the worst atrocities during the Kwangju massacre). Since Chun's class were the first to enter the KMA they did not have any upper class-men (sunbaes) to help guide them through life and school traditions. Therefore, they took the job of being upper class men very seriously and took great pains to mentor the classes behind them. As officers from the first class to graduate from a four-year curriculum, they resented higher-ranking officers who had no more than a junior college (sometimes only high school) education. These factors inbred in Chun and his classmates a sense of superiority and legitimacy as the only bona fide officers in the ROK Army, and they secretly loathed all officers senior in rank, which made insubordination and the putsch of December 12th all the more possible.

Chun Doo Hwan showed early traits of leadership while still a cadet at the academy; among other things he was the captain of the KMA soccer team and had other ample opportunities to show his leadership skills as a cadet.²⁷ In 1959 Captain Chun went to the United States for a five-month training program on psychological warfare (Pysops) at the United States Special Combat School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina (home of Delta Force and 82nd Airborne Division). On May 16, 1961, when Brigadier General Park Chung Hee and his followers led the military coup, Captain Chun took the initiative to contact General Park and to offer him his allegiance. Chun was

²⁷ Translated from Shin Dong-Ah's Periodical, August, 1993. Pg.'s 255-257.

credited with having persuaded the cadets of the KMA to stage a pro-coup march through the streets of Seoul showing support for General Park. For his efforts, Park appointed Chun as one of his senior secretaries in charge of civilian petitioning affairs. The subsequent career pattern of Chun Doo Hwan in the military was smooth and rapid.²⁸ In 1966 Lieutenant Colonel Chun was elected president of the North Star Club, an alumni association for KMA graduates of the four -year regularized course of education (eleventh class to the twenty-fifth class). On January 1, 1973, Chun Doo Hwan was the first in his class to be promoted to brigadier general. Park Chung Hee personally pinned on the rank. On March 5 1979, Major General Chun Doo Hwan was appointed to the key position of commander of the Military Security Commanding Agency, which subsequently enabled him to successfully plot the coups in December 1979 and in May of 1980

²⁸ Kihl, Young Whan, Politics and Policies in Divided Korea Regimes in Contest,

CHAPTER THREE:

Censorship of the Media

The U.S. inability to overcome various manipulations of the Chun regime reached its pinnacle during the Kwangju massacre, which directly contributed to the rise in anti-Americanism. During this tumultuous period in Korea, the U.S. was unable to promote a favorable opinion of itself to the South Korean people. One key attributing factor was the near absolute censorship of the Korean media by the military regime and the resulting inability of the U.S. government to convey its view to the Korean people. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard Holbrooke on Sunday morning, May 18, met with Korean Ambassador Kim Yong Shik to inform the Ambassador that the Department of State was issuing a public statement at 1p.m. that day deploring the extension of complete martial law throughout Korea. Ambassador Kim protested the U.S. statement, but Holbrooke said future statements would be even more critical of events "continued down the present path." He warned that relations between the U.S. and Korea would be endangered.²⁹ On May 18 1980 and again on May 19, the U.S. State Department issued a strong statement denouncing the actions taken by the Korean military. The statement in part read: "We are deeply disturbed by the extension of martial law throughout the Republic of Korea, the closing of universities and the arrest of a number of political and student leaders. Progress toward liberalization must be accompanied by respect for the law. However, we are concerned that the

²⁹ U.S. Government Statement on the events in Kwangju, Dept. of State, 1989,pg. 13

actions which the government has now taken will exacerbate problems in the Republic of Korea. We have made clear the seriousness of our concern to Korean leaders, and we have stressed our belief that progress toward constitutional reform and the election of a broadly based civilian government, as earlier outlined by President Choi, should be resumed promptly. We urge all elements in Korean society to act with restraint at this difficult time. As we affirmed on October 26, 1979, the U.S. government will react strongly in accordance with its treaty obligations to any external attempt to exploit the situation in the Republic of Korea."³⁰ This was an unequivocal and strong expression of disapproval by the U.S. State Department towards the actions taken by the Korean military regime and wanted this message to be as widely disseminated as possible. Thereby, the State Department ensured these statements were distributed to at least a dozen South Korean correspondents in Washington D.C.³¹ The Associated Press also carried the story on May 18 immediately after its issuance. However, the Korean media completely ignored these statements and nothing was mentioned in the Chosun or Dong-A Daily, the two major Korean newspapers. The first Korean coverage of any U.S. reaction came from the Chosun Daily's Washington correspondent, under the front-page headlines, "U.S. Airforce Will Immediately Respond To Any Threats Towards Korean Peninsula," the story quoted a U.S. Air Force General stating, "the U.S. is fully ready to rapidly counter any North Korean air aggression."³² This type of selective coverage by the Korean media had

³⁰ U.S. Government Statement on the events in Kwangju, Dept. of State, 1989, pg. 13.

³¹ Ibid. pg.15.

³² Chosun Daily, May 21, 1980, pg. 1.

two purposes: to imply to the Koreans that North Korea had shown signs of aggression and to display U.S. resolve in keeping their security commitment with Korea, regardless of who was the leader of South Korea.

As a society we teach and are taught that one of the most cherished and zealously guarded individual rights in a democracy is the ability to agree or disagree with current policies. Whether the method chosen to exercise this right is done individually, expressed in a newspaper editorial or expressed collectively in street demonstration, it is left to the discretion of the individual to decide. Indeed, each of us at one point or another have probably been encouraged to participate in the political process to agree or disagree with policies that affect our daily lives. However, Stuart Hall describes the making of a news story or the media as a process of "encoding," which strongly suggests one "preferred reading" of the text. He maintains that the process of encoding a story reflects the social relations, or relations of power in a society. These relations predetermine an outcome by giving the intended reader a twist or slant of an event from which the reader can only logically conclude in a certain way, thereby constructing the truth.³³

The extent of control over the media's encoding process or censorship varies depending on the society's political system. In advanced capitalist societies it tends to be subtly enforced and indirect, through professional practices and norms. For example, most Americans believe that active participation in the political process often forces politicians to take stances on

³³ Hall, Stuart, Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979, London, Hutchinson: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, pg. 129, 1980.

strong emotional issues that represent the interests of the most vocal corporate and/or private advocates. In most authoritarian states the censorship is direct, open, and coercive, thereby denying the people any incentive or ability to actively participate in the political process. But in either case, media controllers worldwide have attempted to exercise their influence over the process of story telling, in effect creating and reproducing popular consent for the system in dominance.³⁴

Chun's new military regime was no exception, and his unlawful grasp of power led to widespread public resentment of the regime. Thus, he fully utilized media censorship as a central means to construct an image of legitimacy. For its own survival, the regime adopted several oppressive measures to integrate the media establishments as an integral part of the ruling apparatus. Consequently, South Korean newspapers and television networks were reduced to an extension of the regime's propaganda machine.

The regime appointed information specialists not only as media policy officials, but also as politically appointed media managers. These media gurus conducted massive public affairs campaigns to articulate the regime's reformist visions on the one hand, and screen out intolerable critical voices on the other. The main mission of these media specialists was to construct favorable opinions of the regime on the part of the general public through censored interpretative media contents.³⁵

³⁴ Ibid. Pg. 130.

³⁵ Information, Freedom and Censorship, The Article 19 World Report, 1988, Longman Group, United Kingdom Limited, 1988.

Censoring U.S. related news constituted an integral part of Chun's regime. From late -1979 through mid -1980, the media managers exercised almost complete control over every news item regarding official response to the rapidly changing political situation in Korea. They were to ensure that the media promoted the image of American endorsement of Chun's military regime and its rise to power. This was a ploy to manufacture U.S. recognition of the military leadership, which in turn would secure a certain amount of domestically absent legitimacy.

In retrospect, Chun's ambition and ruthlessness towards Koreans had the unwanted side effect (from Chun's perspective) of re-igniting the flames of the Minjung nationalism movement. According to Choi Chungmoo, "Korean minjung nationalists hold that the incorporation of multiple nations into a state with artificial borders, such as India, South Africa, and the former Soviet Union, is the consequence of some form of colonialism. Although national division of Korea runs counter to the arbitrary incorporation in these countries, to the eyes of minjung nationalists, national unification is coterminous with decolonization. Their discourse contextualizes Korean unification in this sense of world history and attempts to overcome the division of a people with a common culture and history. It aims to fulfill the will of the people. Minjung nationalism resists blatant political negotiations motivated only by the interests of individual rulers, political parties or even by the vested political and economic interest of the powerful members of the international community. In fact, minjung nationalism denounces the authority of the two superpowers, which divided Korea against the will of the people, and their Cold War ideologies. It also denounces the absorption of

other countries into satellite states and blocs. In other words, minjung nationalism resists any form of imperialism.³⁶

The rise of anti-Americanism is inseparable from the tragic event in Kwangju because the U.S. was still widely perceived as the guardian of South Korea in the early 1980s, not only as the provider of security, but also as an influential commentator on human rights, democracy, and free trade. Therefore, Chun used all available means to convince the Korean people that the United States supported his emergence, while at the same time, he proceeded to manipulate the Carter administration into viewing Korea from a perspective advantageous to his own political purpose. The absence of domestic legitimacy made U.S. support an absolute necessity for the survival of the regime. Consequently, all media coverage of the United States regarding Korean affairs, i.e., White House comments and State Department briefings, were carefully orchestrated to construct a positive picture of Chun by the U.S. This practice was consistently maintained throughout the regime's rule, starting from the 12/12-putsch through the Kwangju uprising, to the day Chun stepped down from office in June of 1987.

On August 28, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke expressed his displeasure with General Chun by stating "One of our largest concerns, Mr. Chairman, has been the distortion, sometimes the deliberate distortion of American policy positions by the leadership of the Republic of Korea in recent months." He continues, "We do not believe it is compatible with the close relations between longstanding treaty allies and between the

³⁶ Choi, Chungmoo, The Minjung Culture Movement and the Construction of Popular Culture in Korea, 1995, University of Hawaii Press, pg. 105.

United States and a country in which some 33,000 Americans shed their blood a generation ago to see the public statements of American officials, including on occasion the President himself, misrepresented to the Korean people." He made this comment in testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs.³⁷ As the above examples demonstrate, the U.S. government's frustration with South Korean military leadership reached a serious stage during the Carter administration. Although U.S. officials frequently and openly denounced the South Korean military leaders in Washington, U.S. officials in Seoul were not effective in delivering U.S. views to the Korean people. This was mostly due to the strict censorship of the Korean media by the military regime. Only a few U.S. statements received media coverage, and then with significant distortions of the intended meanings. Recognizing the problem, the embassy and USIS strongly protested against the arbitrary misrepresentation of U.S. positions. The New York Times reported that "the United States Embassy here has fumed publicly" over the distortion by the South Korean media. "It mailed to some 3,000 Americans in the private community here a compilation of recent statements by President Carter, Secretary Muskie and the State Department spokesman, Hodding Carter 3d, on South Korean political development."³⁸

³⁷ U.S.-South Korean Relations, Hearings before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives Ninety-Sixth Congress Second session June 25 and August 28, 1980, U.S. Government Printing Office Washington, pg. 31, 1980.

³⁸ New York Times, June 23, 1980, pg.3.

However, partly because there were no other means to convey U.S. views directly to the Korean people, and partly because American diplomats in Seoul failed to envision the magnitude of the rising public resentment against the U.S., they did very little else to overcome the barriers set up by the military regime. These conditions, in the end, led to a virtual collapse of communication between the Carter administration and Chun's military regime. According to the *New York Times*, there were some discussions in Washington of ordering Ambassador Gleysteen and General John A. Wickham not to return to the Chun regime. It was decided, however, to send them back "to exert as much influence as possible on the situation".³⁹

Manipulations of the facts by the Korean media continued through the summer of 1980, epitomized by the misquoting of President Jimmy Carter's strongly worded letter to Chun Doo Hwan upon his election to the presidency on August 27, 1980. "President Carter said today that South Korea's new President, Chun Doo Hwan, should move quickly to restore democracy and complete freedom of expression to his country and should eliminate imprisonment of political opponents. 'Mr. Carter said his views were clear and were well known to President Chun' and would continue to use his influence to persuade South Korea to move towards a democracy. At the same time, reconfirming U.S. security commitments to South Korea." However, the controlled media reported it differently, Korean newspaper headlines read: "Carter: Personal Message to President Chun Expresses

³⁹ *New York Times*, August 29, 1980, pg. 31. This decision was corroborated by a secret memorandum written on May 22, 1980 in a Policy Review Committee Chaired by Secretary Edmund Muskie.

Support for Korea's New Government" from the Dong-A Daily and "Security Commitment to Korea: The Major U.S. Policy", from the Chung-Ang Daily.⁴⁰

Ironically, the emergence of the anti-American rhetoric was an outcome of the falsely constructed image of the United States as a supporter of Chun. Student groups, labor activists, and progressive intellectuals gradually launched anti-American publicity campaigns after the bloody military suppression of the Kwangju Uprising in May of 1980. Democratic forces soon recognized that anti-Americanism turned out to be an effective counter-hegemonic tool for winning the support of uncommitted people, who apparently did not like the military regime. Anti-Americanism was also a vehicle for public pressure on the U.S. to re-evaluate its way of dealing with the military regime, and became synonymous with democracy.

⁴⁰ U.S. Government Statement on the events in Kwangju, Dept. of State, 1989, pg.'s 21-22.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE RENEWAL OF INTEREST IN KWANGJU

The renewal in interest of the Kwangju Popular Uprising came as a result of President Kim Young Sam enacting a Special Law to prosecute former presidents Chun and Roh for their respective roles in a 1979 coup d'état and 1980 bloody crackdown on Korean citizens in Kwangju. After decades of authoritarian and quasi-military dictatorships, in December 1992 Korea elected a civilian president, former dissident leader Kim Young Sam. However, the opportunistic political deal he made with ex-President Roh in order to be elected raised serious questions concerning his career as an opposition party leader. Yet, Kim Young Sam (YS) won the election and became the first civilian president in 30 years; hope was high that history might finally be "corrected" (*yoksa barojapki*) when he became inaugurated as President in February 1993. However, in May of '93, only months after he was inaugurated, President Kim opposed hauling the former presidents before court over the Kwangju incident. Choosing instead to let "history to determine the full truth if there are still doubts about it," his statement met with outrage in Kwangju.⁴¹ After questioning 269 people for over one year and reviewing more than 100,000 pages of material, the Seoul Prosecutor's Office announced that the acts of the former presidents in the December 12 coup and Kwangju crackdown were "unindictable offenses" for which the

⁴¹ Many speculated a deal had been struck by Kim not to prosecute the former presidents, in return for their support of him during the election.

state had “no authority to prosecute”⁴² and cited the need for national unity. However, accompanying this finding were several shocking side developments. First in October, an opposition party member revealed that former President Roh had amassed a huge slush fund while in office (\$654 million). This event caused a dramatic turnaround on November 24th, 1995, in which, to punish Chun and Roh President Kim Young Sam instructed his ruling party to draft a special law to unearth the truth about the May 18th Incident.⁴³ As his own political fortunes had waned, President Kim Young Sam abruptly turned against his two predecessors, promising to “right the wrongs of history and to restore our honor and regain our self-esteem.”⁴⁴ Finally on August 26th, 1996, after more than eight months of detailed testimony from the defense and prosecution, Korea’s so called “trial of the century” led to Chun and Roh Tae Woo being charged with the 12/12 putsch as well as the Kwangju massacre. The Supreme Court Chief Justice stated: “Chun Doo Hwan created an intolerable situation throughout the nation by implementing stifling measures deliberately designed to provoke negative responses from all members of society who opposed transfer of power to the military. Chun in effect, ensnared and identified all his political rivals by (1) Expanding full martial law to the entire country (2) Dissolving the National Assembly (3) Establishing a formal Emergency Council and (4) Prohibiting

⁴² Waters, David, Korean Constitutionalism and the Special Act to Prosecute Former Presidents Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo. The Columbia Journal of Asian Law, Vol. 10, No.2, pg. 465.

⁴³ Donga Ilbo, Nov. 28, 1995, Front Page.

⁴⁴ Los Angeles Times, December 16, 1995

all political activities." The verdict continued, "the crackdown in Kwangju was premeditated with malice designed specifically to fulfill Chun's own political aspirations. First, Chun deliberately created the chaotic situation in Kwangju by giving the students no other choice but to revolt against the martial law troops. He then ordered the Army Special Forces to move in and brutally suppress the pro-democracy movement. Chun used Kwangju to elevate his image as one of a strong leader who could bring stability to a volatile region."⁴⁵ One can imagine that after seeing the Shah of Iran unexpectedly overthrown on February 1979, the perception of Chun as a military strongman stabilizing Korea did not hurt his image in the eyes of the Carter administration.

Perceptions of American complicity in the Kwangju tragedy reached a high point after Chun voluntarily stepped down from office and free elections were held. His hand picked successor; Roh Tae Woo was elected president. However, due to his close association with Chun, Roh's administration was under constant criticism regarding his role in the 12/12 putsch and the Kwangju massacre. The newly elected president made efforts to increase his popularity resulting in a Korean government inquiry forwarded to the United States government regarding the US's role in Kwangju and answered then in a White Paper on Kwangju prepared by the Bush administration in 1989.

In February 1996, Tim Shorrock obtained under the Freedom of Information Act the "Cherokee Files," which recorded U.S. diplomatic and military correspondence at the time of the Kwangju uprising. Using evidence

⁴⁵ Translated from Korean Central News Agency, August 26, 1996. All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.

from these declassified files, he wrote a sensational article which directly contradicted the 1989 White Paper on Kwangju, which had concluded that “U.S. officials were alarmed by reports of plans to use military units to back up the police in dealing with student demonstrations” and “had neither authority over nor prior knowledge of the movement of the Special Warfare Command (emphasis his) units to Kwangju.”

Shorrock argued that “top officials in the Carter administration gave prior approval to South Korean contingency plans to use military units against the student and labor protests in Kwangju in May of 1980”.⁴⁶ Shorrock did not, however, consider the possibility that Chun might have been manipulating the Carter administration and the Korean public to take such actions. Articles such as this, which disseminate a negative interpretation of U.S. actions in Kwangju by taking selected excerpts of official correspondence out of context without providing a full understanding of the entire picture, are biased, unprofessional and shortsighted.

The files related to the Kwangju incident lead deeper into U.S. and Korean foreign relations than the somewhat simplistic theory Tim Shorrock suggests (that is, that the U.S. was directly responsible for releasing South Korean troops under U.S. command to suppress the Kwangju uprising of 1980). Rather, the “Cherokee Files” suggest a scenario, according to which former President Chun Doo Hwan deliberately orchestrated the events in Kwangju to ascend to the presidency. Chun realized the quickest route to the top position was to receive legitimizing backing from the U.S. government.

⁴⁶ Shorrock, Tim. US Role in Korea in 1979 and 1980.

However, a stumbling block to Chin's ambition was the Carter administration that was anxious to prevent the re-militarization of the ROK government. The Carter administration repeatedly sent strong and unambiguous messages to Chun that the U.S. government would firmly support Acting President Choe Kyu Ha until a new civilian government could take his place. Experiencing sharp differences with President Park Chung Hee over a variety of issues, including human rights, U.S. troop withdrawal, and KoreaGate, Carter welcomed an opportunity for an orderly change of government through the process of free elections. However, the powerful intelligence agency within the military, the Military Security Commanding Agency (*Gukgun Boan Saryeonbu*) headed by Major General Chun Doo Hwan, could not be so easily dissuaded, and continued to devise a plan to bring down the credibility of interim President Choe Kyu Ha.

Shorrock's intentions in writing the article may have been to provoke a response from the U.S. government to account for its handling of the Kwangju uprising, but in any event, the contents of the article seem misleading and decontextualized. The strongest piece of evidence that Shorrock cites to condemn the U.S. for giving approval to use Korean Special Forces in Kwangju is very problematic.⁴⁷ He states, "On May 8, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that Korean Special Forces were on nationwide alert and noted that the 7th Special Forces Regiment – which was responsible for the worst brutalities in Kwangju – 'was probably targeted against unrest' at Kwangju universities." I have obtained

⁴⁷ In all fairness to Mr. Shorrock, we are all indebted to him for taking the effort to obtain the Cherokee Files through the Freedom of Information Act.

the document that Shorrock quoted from, and the paragraph in its entirety actually states: "Only the 7th BDE remained away from the Seoul area if you consider the 5th BDE at Inchon as being in the Capital Area. [Blacked Out (typically it would be the sources name) states] the 7th BDE was probably targeted against unrest at Chonju and Kwangju Universities. The 11th BDE held a staff/Commanders meeting on Sunday, 4 May 80." ⁴⁸ The format and contents of this report is not characteristic of a Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) generated report; it is rather more likely what the intelligence community refers to as "raw unevaluated intelligence." The only possible instance "raw intelligence" would be briefed to the Joint Chiefs of Staffs would be in times of national emergencies, such as war. Shorrock advocates that this report alone should have been sufficient evidence to send U.S. military forces to intervene or, at the least, sharply protest through diplomatic channels. However, the U.S. cannot make major policy decisions based on every unevaluated, raw, unconfirmed, low level intelligence report of an impending event. To do so would not only be irresponsible but the consequences would be chaotic. Therefore, it is preposterous for Shorrock to suggest this report holds the "smoking gun" revealing the U.S. had prior knowledge and approved the deployment of Korean Special Forces troops to Kwangju. By reading the entire context and not just a small excerpt of this intelligence report, any casual observer can discount Shorrock's claim that the Joint Chiefs of Staff knew of the impending tragedy to occur in Kwangju. Instead, it is as though Shorrock had the luxury of looking back at the sea of

⁴⁸ Cherokee Files, cable from Intelligence Officer to DIA dated May 8, 1980.

data and picking out any marginally relevant information to implicate the U.S.

While Shorrock is erroneous in his argument regarding U.S. having prior knowledge and approval of the Korean Special Forces unprovoked attack on Kwangju on May 17, he is correct in his assessment of the Carter administration's approval to use Korean troops under Combined Forces Command on 22 May. However, the decision to approve the use of the ROK's 20th Division was not due to correct and abundant intelligence. Rather, the decisions were based on inaccurate and deliberately skewed intelligence, which were fed from Chun's military regime to the U.S. A primary source of information flow for the U.S. was the KCIA intelligence channel, but the KCIA after Park's death had become largely ineffective, owing to the fact that their director had assassinated the president. This allowed its competitor, the Military Security Commanding Agency (MSCA), to become the center of intelligence flow. Chun, the Commander of MSCA took advantage of the crisis by ensuring that all high-ranking officials of the KCIA were investigated for any connection to the assassination. Chun was appointed as the acting director of the KCIA on 14 April, shortly after he reshuffled personnel by replacing 33 of 40 senior officials above the section-chief level. Secondly, he changed the organization to eliminate the offices of assistant director, and scaled down the number of employees in the agency.⁴⁹

The following clearly depicts the degree to which U.S. intelligence depended on the South Korean government in assessing the situation in South

⁴⁹ Haptong Press, cited in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (Asia & Pacific),

Korea of the "student action/ government reaction". On May 8, 1980 Warren Christopher cabled U.S. Ambassador to Korea William Gleysteen to "convey to Chun a sense that we have a shared interest in not having a student/government clash destabilize the country or upset the possibilities for sound political development. In the past the KCIA has had fairly good intelligence on student activists, and you might ask him what he believes is motivating student pressures toward confrontation."⁵⁰ The absurdity of this cable is truly disturbing. Chun Doo Hwan was the acting director of KCIA at this time, and the students were demanding his resignation. Yet, Warren Christopher requested Ambassador Gleysteen to receive intelligence from LTG Chun as to "why the students were becoming more confrontational" --in effect, he was asking the wolf to guard the sheep.

To answer the question of "why the students were becoming more confrontational?" One must understand the draconian measures undertaken by Park Chung Hee, who had suppressed the people of South Korea for the past 18 years. With the assassination of Park, the entire nation witnessed an opportunity to move towards the direction of reduced authoritarianism and an increase in personal liberties, only to see it slipping through their grips in the form of Chun Doo Hwan. Park Chung Hee, also seized power through a military coup in 1961, ending the short, democratically elected regime of Prime Minister Chang Myon (John Chang). Park declared a "purification process" against all corrupt and self-serving politicians of the previous era.

⁵⁰ Cherokee Files, cable dated May 8, 1980 from Assistant Secretary of State Warren Christopher replying back to Ambassador Gleysteen regarding his upcoming meeting with Chun Doo Hwan.

In effect, this was a backlash on the part of the military against civilian inefficiency.⁵¹ The public was perceived to tacitly accept this coup because of the wide perception of party politicians as being corrupt, immature, and unable to subordinate individual ambitions to the party or national solidarity.⁵² This point was the major difference between Chun and Park's rise to power.

The Park regime operated on two basic policies: a strong military defense against the threat from the North under the leadership of a strong president with military experience, and a rapidly growing economy. When Park's First Five Year Economic Plan was launched in 1962, South Korea's exports were a mere \$55 million; by 1978 they had reached \$12.4 billion. During the same period per capita GNP rose rapidly from \$87 to \$1,242. South Korea had reached the status of a "new industrial nation" and had surpassed North Korea in economic power in the mid 70's.⁵³ However, his repressive measures could hardly be called typical of a free, democratic nation state and brought about increased public dissatisfaction. Park's authoritarian leadership and the political system he directed led to increased student demonstrations and narrow margins of victory in presidential elections. To counter this mutinous behavior, Park revised the constitution to

⁵¹ Strikingly similar scenario to the Chun takeover in 1979-1980, except the public did not initially accept Chun's coup.

⁵² Palais, James, Human Rights in the Republic of Korea, Asia Watch Committee, 1985, pg.'s 13-23.

⁵³ Under Chun Doo Hwan (1980-87) the GNP rose from \$1,587 to \$3,089. Source IMF, International Financial Statistics (IFS), 1990.

guarantee him presidency for life; this was the infamous Yushin, or revitalization constitution of 1972. This new constitution gave him the right to appoint one-third of the members of the National Assembly, to declare martial law, and take emergency measures as necessary. The most notorious of these measures was Emergency Measure 9 of May 13, 1975. This made any criticism of the president, or even the decree itself, a criminal offense. Torture was used on a regular basis to achieve forced confessions, and judges were in constant jeopardy of losing their positions for contrary decisions.

In late 1973 and 1974, the front pages of the *Donga Ilbo* and other newspapers carried wide coverage revealing in detail the water and electric tortures used on the victims of political persecution. The Park government responded by closing off recently opened avenues of expression and in 1974 and 1975 launched a full campaign to bring the press to a halt. The last holdout was the *Donga Ilbo*. When government intimidated its major advertisers into canceling their accounts and forced the banks to refuse any loans, the public at large took up a subscription campaign to save the paper. Over 800 reporters were forced out of their jobs in one year from 1975 to 1976. For the next several years the mass media was converted into little more than an agency for government propaganda, a la Chun in 1979. The Carter administration, with its Human Rights foreign policy, became very critical of the Park regime. The prestige Seoul had gained from its economic progress was lost through ruthless repression. By the late 70's South Korea was widely condemned as a corrupt police state.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Shaw William, Human Rights in Korea Historical and Policy Perspectives,

His own Director of the KCIA, Kim Jae Kyu, assassinated Park and Presidential Security Chief, Cha Ji Chul on Oct. 26 1979. The shroud of secrecy, which lay behind the motivations of Kim Jae Kyu in killing Park, brought about many speculations. One scenario suggests that the U.S. CIA encouraged Kim Jae Kyu to assassinate Park (a) to bring about reprieve for the pro-democracy and human rights movement (b) to stop development of a nuclear weapons project that could endanger the Asian regional balance of power. What gave rise to such speculations? Let's begin with a brief description of the environment. Seoul constitutes a city comprised of more than 12 million people. This is where the Chaebols, politicians, generals, foreign embassies, financial districts, artists and the student activists all converge and maintain their center of operations. To put this in proper perspective, if you could physically up-root Washington D.C., New York City and Los Angeles and squeeze them together in an area the size of Chicago, then you would roughly be able to equate this imaginary city with the importance of Seoul. This is the place where all the so-called "movers and shakers" conduct their side deals and elbow their way towards infamy. Lately, high profile personnel cannot sneeze in Seoul without a 10-page essay analyzing and reporting what this sneeze in reality meant to the insiders. It is the image, not the truth, which often gets interpreted as the truth and determines behavior in Seoul. Therefore, the amicable relationship between Korea's Central Intelligence Agency Director, Kim Jye-Kyu, and then US CIA station chief Robert Brewster, left a strong impression on Koreans that the US government approved or even ordered the assassination of President Park Chung-Hee by Director Kim. Moreover, Ambassador William Gleysteen's eerie remark, " In the case of Park Chung Hee, our actions and words may

have contributed indirectly to his demise," only served to heighten the suspicion of a conspiracy.⁵⁵ These perceptions left many to speculate that Director Kim assassinated Park with the backing of the US, but became a liability after he failed to grab power. This theory is further strengthened by Director Kim pre-arranging a rendezvous within the same compound timed to overlap with the assassination of Park, with the ROK Military Chief of Staff, General Chung Seung-Hwa, who was known to be a moderate in favor of restoring public trust in the military. Intelligence Director Kim apparently envisioned a joint assumption of control with General Chung to form a new and democratic South Korea.

According to an article written by Professor Young Whan Kihl, President Park emphasized a plan for the establishment of research centers such as the Korean Institute of Science and Technology (KIST) and encouraged a number of overseas Korean scientists to return to Korea. Kihl contended that the South Korean Government clearly opposed a multilateral agreement on a nuclear-free zone for Korea and that "Seoul has invested in the development of its own nuclear capability and indeed may have already crossed the threshold of no return on a nuclear time table."⁵⁶ Moreover, Professor Young Sun Ha wrote an article confirming that South Korea already possessed enough experts and engineers for developing nuclear weapons. He

⁵⁵ Gleysteen, William H. Jr. Korea: A Special Target of American Concern, The Diplomacy of Human Rights edited by David Newsom, University Press of America, Inc. 1986. Pg. 99.

⁵⁶ Young Whan Kihl, "Korea's Future: Seoul's Perspective," Asian Survey 17 (November 1977): 1064-76.

also observed that President Park had ordered his Defense Development Agency to study the possibility of developing its own nuclear weapons as soon as Saigon fell in 1975. Ha basically surmised that the South Korean government might seriously consider developing its own nuclear weapon system in order to both effectively deter Northern attack and use it as a "bargaining chip" in negotiating the withdrawal schedule with the United States.⁵⁷ Given the background of these circumstances, the theory of Intelligence Director Kim conspiring with the U.S. to assassinate Park is plausible. If this scenario were factual, it would follow that Kim would have anticipated support and backing from the Carter administration in his attempt to take charge of Korea. Director Kim obviously had no such luck; he failed to receive any type of endorsement from the United States Government and was promptly arrested, tried for treason, and executed by May of 1980.⁵⁸ Following the assassination, Martial Law was immediately declared in Seoul and Premier Choi Kyu Ha became acting President. The United States Government was at a loss, according to one Korean diplomat "They witness

⁵⁷ Young Sun Ha, "Nuclearization of Small States and World Power Order: The case of Korea," Asian Survey 18 (November 1978): 1139-43.

⁵⁸ U.S. officials in Seoul and Washington realized they had a potentially disastrous public relations problem due to the long and close relationship between Kim Jae Kyu and U.S. diplomats and intelligence operatives. In addition the U.S. House committee wanted to hold congressional hearings on the Park assassination. Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs had persuaded Rep. Lester Wolf, a Democrat to "postpone indefinitely" the hearing. Cherokee File cable dated Nov. 21, 1979.

(ed) all the policy making of three decades crumble in their hands- General Chun is not their friend and who knows what comes after him.”⁵⁹

The front page of the New York Times illustrates the basic sentiments of the U.S. populace, depicting the changing of power in South Korea as trivial and confusing. On 14 December 1979 two days after the coup d'état by Chun and his cohorts, the New York Times front page had the photo of President and Mrs. Carter with the caption, “National Tree To Stay Unlighted For Hostages”. Juxtaposed on the same page was a small article, “7 Top Generals Are Held in Seoul; Military Power Struggle is Seen”. The narrative of the article was vague and confusing, as the reporter quoted two contradictory accounts of the same event. First, the reporter quoted Defense Minister Ro, “Some shootings occurred by mistake in the Defense Ministry compound at around two A.M. today between sentry guards and martial-law troops arriving for deployment. There were no casualties.” Then the reporter quoted a different account, “... more than a hundred rounds were fired (in) an apparent action by General Chon’s forces against officers allied with General Chung. Ambulances were said to have gone to the Defense Ministry, which is just across a highway.....”⁶⁰ Chun Doo Hwan was adept in using the media; his U.S. Psychological Warfare Training probably became very useful to control the Korean and United States media. The Defense Minister who was quoted in the New York Times article was Ro Che Hyon, who had been arrested by Chun Doo Hwan and released only hours before on the condition that he cooperate with Chun by recommending to President Choi

⁵⁹ New York Times, Dec. 15, 1979, Front Page.

⁶⁰ Stokes, Henry. New York Times, 14 December 1979. Pg. 1

Kyu Ha that he sign the arrest warrant for Acting Martial Law Commander General Chong Sung Hwa (who was already incarcerated).

The depiction of the New York Times and the contents within can be seen as a microcosm of not only the confusion in Korea, but also the humiliation surrounding the United States which was mesmerized for 444 days with the Iranian Hostage Crisis, and took little notice of Korea.

Role of Kwangju

Chun Doo Hwan was the de facto President of Korea prior to his official inauguration in August of 1980, he was the instigator of the brutalities in Kwangju. He wielded power through the backing of the military since the 12/12 putsch by blatantly violating basic military codes and taking advantage of the strict chain of command and hierarchical rank structure. He purged fellow brethren-in-arms who disapproved of his abuse and violation of the sacred oath of the military which emphasizes political neutrality, placing the needs of the country over personal ambitions, and following orders of the duly elected civilian representatives of the people.

On May 17, 1980, Lieutenant General Chun Doo Hwan's official title was Commander of the Military Security Commanding Agency (equivalent to Head of Army Intelligence) and concurrently serving as Acting Director of the Korean CIA. Chun was not the Korean Army Chief of Staff nor did his position authorize him to directly command any Korean combat units. This notwithstanding, he gave direct orders to Brigadier General Chung Ho Young, Commander of the 7th Special Forces Regiment to mobilize his forces to Kwangju. These instructions to mobilize were based upon false intelligence reports from the 505th Intelligence Brigade, which was directly under Chun's

command and control⁶¹. Thus, by sending the Special Warfare Regiment to Kwangju, Chun Doo Hwan bypassed six different command levels of the military organizational hierarchy. First and foremost, the President of Korea and then → the Commander of the ROK Army, → Commander of the 2nd ROK Army Defense Force, → Commander of Combat Doctrine and Military Education, → Commander of ROK 31st Division. According to the task organizational chart, the 31st Division should have had direct control over the 7th Special Forces Regiment. However, the 31st Division had the distinction of being known as a second rate unit within the ROK Army; moreover Chun did not know the commanding officer who happened to be a Honam native. Thus, Chun chose to bypass the 31st despite its near proximity, and chose instead to direct to Kwangju the elite Special Forces unit to Kwangju, commanded by a crony he knew and trusted. Brigadier General Chung Ho Young, was personally selected by Chun to command the Special Forces Regiment soon after the 12/12 putsch; he also was a former classmate at the Korean Military Academy, a Kyongsan native and a member of Hana-Hwe. When civic leaders of Kwangju met with the 31st Division Commander, Major General Chung Eng, and demanded an explanation for the atrocities committed by the Special Forces soldiers, they found that General Chung Eng was just as oblivious to the mobilization of the 7th Special Forces Regiment as the citizens of Kwangju. The 31st Division Commander was not a member of Chun's inner core group and thus not privy to the information; he elected to

⁶¹ Actual tape recordings of the orders and false reports were used in the trial of Chun and Roh

resign rather than be part of an organization which could carry out such brutalities.

Spring marks the traditional time for demonstrations to begin on university campuses throughout Korea. A major theme of student protests throughout the month of May 1980 were; (1) the removal of Chun who had appointed himself acting director of the KCIA despite a provision in the governing law prohibiting an active duty military person from doing so (2) end martial law, and (3) press for early, direct elections. At its peak, as many as 100,000 students demonstrated on the streets of downtown Seoul chanting those demands. They were met with riot police who attacked with tear gas and clubs, resulting in hundreds being injured. Overcome by the intensity and sheer numbers of the movement, politicians from both major parties agreed to succumb to student protest demands, and announced that they were prepared to vote an end to martial law on 22 May. However, the students, not trusting the lawmakers, continued the protests and it was only after 15 May that Prime Minister Sin Hyon Hwak pleaded to the students, asking for time and promising to take their demands into consideration. Incredibly, the students responded by canceling all demonstrations, and by 16 May were back in their classes.⁶²

On May 17 Ambassador Gleysteen met with Blue House Secretary General Choi Kwang Soo, but was not informed of the impending decision to impose an expanded Full Martial Law. In fact, the notification that martial law would be imposed came to the U.S. embassy only two hours prior to the

⁶² Cohen and Baker, Foreign Policy and Human Rights, East Asian Legal Studies Program of the Harvard Law School, 1991. Pg.'s 191-192.

arrests of opposition leaders Kim Dae Jung, Kim Young Sam, Kim Jong Pil and others.⁶³ Acting on instructions, Ambassador Gleysteen called on President Choi Kyu Ha the following day to deliver a sharp protest, stating the U.S. position that the May 17 crackdown and the move to full martial law was "shocking and astounding." Ambassador Gleysteen, also called for the release of opposition leaders including Kim Dae Jung. President Choi responded that his government had been forced to declare Full Martial Law because it feared it would be toppled by uncontrollable student demonstrations.⁶⁴ Chun had control of all intelligence reporting mechanisms and fed President Choi exaggerated reports of student unrest and recommended imposing martial law. To a non-military person the implementation of martial law at this juncture would seem strange, since there were no demonstrations in Seoul or Kwangju on May 16th or 17th. But to any person familiar with military maneuvers, it would be obvious as to why martial law became implemented on that day. All military operations begin with an operational plan and once the plan becomes initiated the timetable is extremely difficult to modify or rescind, especially if it is on a mass scale and kept confidential. Under the guise of the Emergency Council Chun and his putsch cronies met for 5 hours 20 minutes on April 30, 1980 and the decision

⁶³ Gleysteen, William H. Jr., "A Special Target of American Concern," *The Diplomacy of Human Rights*, edited by David Newsom, 1986, pg. 97.

⁶⁴ U.S. Government Statement on the events in Kwangju, Dept. of State, 1989, pg. 12. The same Kim Dae Jung has just been declared the new president of Korea on Dec. 18, 1997.

to implement the order to incite riots in Kwangju had already been struck.⁶⁵ This date was strategically chosen prior to May 22, 1980 to impede the reconvening of the National Assembly from overruling martial law.

Further evidence of Chun's systematic implementation of the Kwangju massacre, on May 17, 1980, came from Dr. and Mrs. Betts Huntley, who were missionaries in Kwangju. They reported that they were unable to buy bus tickets from Seoul to Taejon because the ROK army had bought out the entire supply. Subsequently, they took the train, only to find the train station was also swarming with soldier activity. They later learned troops across Korea had been transported in preparation for the declaration of martial law at midnight Saturday, May 17.⁶⁶ Martial Law censors controlled Korean media and a complete news blackout was enforced from Sunday, May 18th to Monday May 19th regarding any news from Kwangju. From May 20th the news reports from all the major media sources were filled with half-truths and distortions of events taking place in Kwangju. This caused a major furor among the citizens of Kwangju and forced the local branches of KBS and MBC stations off the air when they torched the building.

There were three parts to Chun's disinformation plan on Kwangju. First, to legitimize his hideous actions in Kwangju, Chun directed his martial

⁶⁵ Documentary film The 4th Republic, Produced by Korean MBC which ran from February 1995 to October 1995. This Docu-Drama was largely credited for the populace of Korea to demand the prosecution of Chun and Roh and led to President Kim Young Sam's dramatic turnaround to enact the "Special Act Law" to prosecute Chun and Roh.

⁶⁶ Warnberg, Tim. The Kwangju Uprising: An Inside View Korean Studies 1987 vol.

law troops to broadcast on the Kwangju radio station that the United States government had approved the use of the ROK military forces sent to Kwangju. The military wanted it to appear the U.S. was supporting their efforts. Second, the martial law soldiers who were mobilized to Kwangju were given a mission statement that "a communist insurrection had taken place and needed to be put down."⁶⁷ Lastly, Chun described the situation in Kwangju to Ambassador Gleysteen "as a city completely taken over by armed rioters who were firing automatic weapons into the paratroopers, and that the government wanted to be restrained, giving the order to fire only if fired upon and even then to aim for the lower half of the body."⁶⁸ This prompted Ambassador Gleysteen on May 22, 1980 to send the following Confidential Comment to Secretary of State Muskie: "Desire for restraint at present seems sincere on part of ROK Army leaders: Containment rather than suppression is the strategy for the present, and the retention of the home and defense ministers in the new cabinet suggests it may continue. Limited firing order given to troops in Kwangju strengthen this impression."

It was with this perception that General Wickham consented to release the Twentieth Division of the ROK Army from its duties in the Seoul area. Gleysteen concurred " I permitted the transfer of well-trained troops of the 20th ROKA Division from martial law duty in Seoul to Kwangju because law and order had to be restored in a situation that had run amok following outrageous behavior of the Korean Special Forces which had never been

⁶⁷ Ibid. Pg. 45.

⁶⁸ Cherokee Files, cable dated May 22, 1980.

under Wickham's command."⁶⁹ Wickham explained the action was in response to a request from the Minister of Defense and as a means of cooperating with the military in controlling a situation that needed to be "nipped in the bud."⁷⁰

Why did Chun choose Kwangju as the place to create such a bloody crackdown? One obvious reason was his ability to easily control all communication channels and personnel access both in and out of Kwangju, thereby effectively controlling the media reports. The military regime purged over seven hundred reporters and editors, about thirty percent of working journalists at that time, in the name of voluntary purification. The victims were largely those who were in defiance of the military regime's media intervention policies and were noted as such by government surveillance monitors, who sadly enough were for the most part journalists themselves.⁷¹

The military regime enacted the Basic Press Law of 1980, which legalized the government supervision of literally all aspects of journalistic activities.⁷² By far the most potent power of this law was to give the Minister of Culture and Information the power to cancel or suspend registration of any

⁶⁹ Gleysteen, William, Jr. New York Times Letter to the editor July 22, 1982. This was in response to Bruce Cumings Op-ed page comments.

⁷⁰ Peterson, Mark. The Kwangju Uprising: Shadows Over the Regime in South Korea. Westview Press 1988. Pg. 61.

⁷¹ Obtained from an interview with an employee of the Korean Ministry of Information, Chung Jin Kyu who is studying at Cornell.

⁷² Information, Freedom and Censorship, The Article 19 World Report, 1988, Longman Group, United Kingdom Limited, 1988.

publications depending on the severity of the violation assessed by the ministry. No court decisions were necessary, the Minister was able to cancel registration of any publications with his order alone. Therefore, newspapers like the Korea Times published headlines such as the following; "students at Choson and Chonnam Universities in Kwangju, manipulated and agitated by Kim Dae Jung, led demonstrations in the provincial capital which led to a violent riot." The official response from Chun's regime continued to implicate North Korean agents along with impure elements cooperating with them to incite the riots in Kwangju.⁷³

Another subtle, yet important factor could be regionalism. First of all, the citizens of Kwangju and the entire "Honam" region have a long history of grievances and "han" (resentment, smoldering bitterness about past wrongs). Some historians' claim that the prejudices against the Honam people can be traced back to the Koryo dynasty (918-1392). Wang Kon, the first king of Koryo, singled out the Paekche (Honam) people in his "Ten Injunctions" and forewarned they "will cause confusion and disorder in government and engage in treason through crafty words and treacherous machinations. They should never be allowed into government service, though they may no longer be slaves and outcasts."⁷⁴ In modern Korea, some people claim it was a direct ploy conjured up by the late President Park Chung-hee to woo voters away from his main political rival, Kim Dae Jung, who was born there in the coastal town of Mokp'o. Park pursued a policy of unbalanced economic

⁷³ Korea Times, June 1, 1980, p.1.

⁷⁴ From Peter H. Lee et al., Sources of Korean Civilization. Pg. 265. and Professor David McCann's lecture on Wang Kon's Ten Injunctions.

development, allowing Kwangju and the surrounding Cholla province to become the most disadvantaged region. It is interesting to note that ex-Presidents Park, Chun, Roh and even the current President of Korea, Kim Young Sam are all from the Kyongsang Province. Simply stated the nation's political and economic power has been concentrated in Kyongsang Province and away from Cholla Province since liberation in 1945 and, therefore, Cholla Province was appropriate as the site for the explosive popular discontent that developed into an armed confrontation. The truth of the matter is, regionalism against the people from the "Honam" region is real; Cholla people are unjustifiably stereotyped as two-faced, conniving, uncooperative, brutish, opportunistic, and uncouth, as well as intelligent and artistic.⁷⁵ It is this type of regionalism and hatred that Chun Doo Hwan counted on when he unleashed the pent-up anger, violence and prejudices of the 7th Special Forces Regiment upon the students at Kwangju.

⁷⁵ Korean Reader (Seoul: Yonsei University Press, 1979) , pp.18-22.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

The rise of the unpopular regime of Chun Doo Hwan and expansion of anti-American sentiments in South Korea were not coincidental. Koreans translated the acquiescence of U.S. policy towards the illegitimate regime of Chun as a betrayal of democracy, which to many Koreans was synonymous with America. These rapid changes in attitudes can be directly attributed to U.S. diplomacy's failure to understand the political conflict in unfamiliar settings, i.e., post-Park. Therefore, the U.S. responded to the situation by supporting what the Vietnamese call *trum men*: the representatives of the old order abdicate the formulation of new societal goals and retreat into the use of military, police and, administration to attain their ends.⁷⁶ There were several reasons for this failure: (1) the nearly absolute censorship of the Korean media by the military regime and the resulting inability of the U.S. government to convey its view to the Korean people; (2) the virtual inability of the U.S. to extrapolate any intelligence as to the internal domestic politics of South Korea following the demise of President Park Chung Hee; (3) exclusion of issues of democratization and human rights as themes of public diplomacy by the early Reagan administration, which focused on revitalizing the weakened security ties.

At the request of the ruling regime, the South Korean media consistently framed U.S. government positions in such a manner that they served the objectives of the military leadership. The obvious consequence

⁷⁶ Cumings, Bruce The Origins of the Korean War vol.1 Princeton University Press, pg. 156, 1981.

was an extensive misrepresentation of U.S. government views that, in turn, resulted in distorted images of the United States in the minds of the Korean people. On May 22, the U.S. made another public announcement, which warned both North Korea and called for dialogue between opposing sides in Kwangju: "We are deeply concerned by the civil strife in the southern city of Kwangju. We urge all parties involved to exercise maximum restraint and undertake a dialogue in search of a peaceful settlement. Continued unrest and an escalation of violence would risk dangerous miscalculation by external forces. When calm is restored, we will urge all parties to seek means to resume a program of political development as outlined by President Choi. We reiterate that the U.S. Government will react strongly accordance with its treaty obligation to any external attempt to exploit the situation in the R.O.K."⁷⁷ Although this statement and subsequent ones were broadcast by the Voice of America, the Korean media did not carry them. In addition, Korean military authorities assured Ambassador Gleysteen and General Wickham that the May 22 U.S. statement would be broadcast and air dropped into Kwangju. Leaflets containing the statement were printed, but U.S. authorities discovered later that they were never dropped or distributed. U.S. officials also discovered that, on the contrary, the local government-controlled radio in Kwangju was reporting that the U.S. had approved the dispatch of the Special Warfare unit forces into Kwangju. Ambassador Gleysteen protested this disinformation to the Korean Government and demanded an official retraction. It was never given. Gleysteen remarked, "I can only

⁷⁷ U.S. Government Statement on the events in Kwangju, Dept. of State, 1989,pg.s 16,17.

speculate as to who was responsible for this nasty twist."⁷⁸ An examination of U.S. statements clearly reveals that there was a strong political determination in the Carter administration to oppose the rise of another military government in South Korea. However, it turned out that there were no solid measures or channels prepared to put the political will into action.

In fact, in the eyes of the Kwangju people, the U.S. alone possessed the ability to stop the repressive military actions. However, as far as the Kwangju citizens were concerned, the U.S. did not take any action. Instead, it appeared that the U.S. fully supported the forceful suppression. This image of U.S. collaboration with the Korean military was a misunderstanding that had resulted from the massive distortion of U.S. reactions by the government controlled media. What is important, however, is that this was how most people in Kwangju understood U.S. reactions.

Secondly, U.S. official communications in the "Cherokee Files" reveal that the U.S. was systematically misrepresented by the military regime. Massive distortions of internal Korean affairs through the misleading intelligence estimates forwarded to U.S. government agencies by South Korean military, intelligence and diplomatic liaison contacts led to questionable U.S. policy. For example, Korean military authorities began to tell the U.S. on May 25 that hard-core radical students had taken over the city, that their demands were excessive, and that they did not seem interested in good faith negotiations, the next day the military began the operation to retake the city. Chun and his cohorts grossly misled the U.S. to believe an

⁷⁸ Gleysteen, William H. Jr. Korea: "A Special Target of American Concern," The Diplomacy of Human Rights, 1986, pg. 96.

image of Far East area instability comparable to that surrounding the internal takeover of Iran. The military regime then conveniently and flagrantly portrayed the U.S. as a scapegoat for the realization of political ambitions of a new group of myopic and avaricious generals and colonels led by President Chun Doo Hwan.

Another issue, which further agitated the emotions of the Korean people, was the policy of silence adopted by the Reagan administration. With Reagan's inauguration, the U.S. condemnation of the military regime was replaced by rhetoric of the "blood forged alliance" and its "special bond" in the anti-Communist struggle. The immediate consequence of this policy shift was a complete abandonment by the U.S. government of the withering democratic forces in South Korea. This radical turn of U.S. policy further reinforced the idea of U.S. support of the military regime. This, in turn, led to a strengthening of anti-American voices in the activist's circles, which gradually penetrated into mainstream society. A most surprising U.S. government action, for many Koreans, was the sudden invitation of President Chun to the White House. The invitation was perhaps intended by the Reagan administration simply as a signal of a conservative turn of U.S. Third World policy to the international community, rather than an official U.S. recognition of the Chun regime. However, regardless of U.S. government intentions, the military censors in South Korea staged this event as a powerful symbol of U.S. support for both President Chun and the military government. Referring to this event, an American analyst noted that "the White House meeting with President Chun Doo Hwan in 1981 was highly visible and brimming with symbolic meaning, especially about human rights issues. To South Korean audiences, it conveyed unqualified support for the Kwangju

tragedy, and did so at a time when questions were being raised about the U.S. role in the incident"⁷⁹. As Larson concluded, through highly publicized mutual state visits, the image of the Reagan-Chun friendship had become a powerful sign of the bilateral relations for the Korean people and the strenuous later efforts to clarify U.S. positions in the Kwangju incident and other critical events resulted in little meaningful effects. Therefore, the rise in anti-Americanism can be attributed partly to the inconsistency of U.S. government's actions, including both the vocal and idealistic "human rights" diplomacy of the Carter administration and the "realistic" conservative anti-Communist alliance policy of the Reagan administration. Thereby, the previous criticisms of political problems raised by the Carter administration were replaced by positive remarks from the subsequent administration either on the strategic importance or on the economic achievements of South Korea. In the mean time, issues of the past such as the unconstitutional takeover by the military and the Kwangju incident were quietly buried, spreading discontent among democratic activists in Korea.

Given the inconsistent and dismal American track record with Korea that includes the Taft-Katsura agreement of 1905⁸⁰, the division of Korea in

⁷⁹ Larson, James F. Quiet Diplomacy in a Television Era: The Media and U.S. Policy towards the Republic of Korea, *Political Communication and Persuasion*, vol. 7 pg. 73-95, 1990.

⁸⁰ Taft-Katsura agreement of 1905, U.S. and Great Britain basically allowed Japan to take over Korea as long as Japanese imperialism stayed away from the Philippines and the South East Asia British Colonies. Akira Ireya, *Pacific Estrangement: Japanese and American Expansion, 1897-1911*, Harvard University Press, 1972, pg.'s 47-48.

1945⁸¹ and alignment of U.S. Military Government with former Japanese collaborators. It should not be a surprise that the people of Korea suspect the U.S. of implicitly taking part in the Kwangju massacre by allowing or encouraging Chun to take power. President Carter devoted much of his attention to human rights violations in Korea, yet in the end his crusade fizzled out as the Iranian Hostage crisis took center stage of his re-election campaign. Was this an inconsistency in US foreign policy towards Korea? Quite the opposite; U.S. policy has been consistently contradictory towards Korea since 1945. The U.S. has endorsed democratic principles, but has supported dictatorial regimes consistently from Sung Man Rhee to Park Chung Hee, Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo. Carter's stabilizing policies were consistent with all previous U.S. administrations dating back to at least 1905. Therefore, questions of whether the U.S. was thoroughly manipulated by Chun or whether the U.S. decision-makers consciously tolerated his actions are important and require further investigation.

Regardless of the arguments I have made in this paper, the cold and hard facts remain that Chun illegitimately took power through the use of force and the U.S. did not intervene to stop him. If the U.S. chose to come between democratic supporters and Chun's military forces, what options would the U.S. have, short of supporting one side over the other with military force? That option was quite inconceivable. Even after thirty-five years of liberation from Japanese colonizers was the Korean consciousness still

⁸¹ On December 16, 1945, The Moscow accords included provisions for a four-power trusteeship for Korea up to five years. Cumings, Bruce. The Origins of the Korean War vol.1 Princeton University Press, pg. 215, 1981.

sufficiently colonized to expect U.S. intervention to solve an internal conflict? I understand the good intentions and eagerness of scholars and journalists to remedy the *Han* of Korea for the cataclysmic events in Kwangju. However to solely place the blame on the U.S. by fanning the flames of anti-Americanism is not the panacea for injustices of the past. The Korean people must come to the realization that they themselves are the only ones who can remedy their own *Han* and set forth an appropriate course. Repulsive as it may sound, the calamitous events in Kwangju may be looked upon as the catalyst that was needed to wean the Korean consciousness from dependency.

APPENDIX A

Chronology of Events

October 26 1979	President Park Chung Hee assassinated. Martial Law declared throughout S. Korea except Cheju island. Prime Minister Choi Kyu Ha becomes Acting President.
December 12 1979	12/12 putsch General Chun Doo Hwan, with the aid of several other military officers, including Roh Tae Woo, arrests martial law commander Chung Sung Hwa, without the approval of CINC and Acting President Choi.
April to May 1980	General Chun becomes acting director of the KCIA while continuing as head of the Military Security Commanding Agency. Demonstrations on campuses continue to grow. Students call for campus reforms and reinstatement of student councils, which were banned during Park's presidency.
May 15, 16, 1980	Prime Minister Shin Hyon Hwak announces government will make concessions and try to speed

<p>May 15, 16 1980 continued</p>	<p>democratization. Responding to this announcement, students call off demonstrations to await government's response. Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam meet and urge students to exercise "maximum self-restraint". In Kwangju, 35,000 students hold a peaceful torchlight procession and then call off further demonstrations.</p>
<p>May 17 1980</p>	<p>Chun, head of the Military Security Commanding Agency ("MSCA"), forces the Choe government to approve his plan to expand martial law to a nationwide level, allowing Chun, as MSCA head, to take the lead in state affairs. All political activity is banned. Universities are closed. National Assembly is barred from meeting. Hundreds of democratic leaders, politicians, students are arrested, including Kim Dae Jung, Kim Young Sam</p>
<p>May 18-20 1980</p>	<p>Citizens in Kwangju demonstrate in opposition to martial law and demand resignation of Chun. Martial law troops reinforced by "Black Beret" paratroopers surround demonstrators and indiscriminately beat and bayoneted them. Resulting in hundreds of deaths. Word of paratrooper brutality spreads. Over 100,000</p>

	Kwangju citizens demonstrate.
May 21 1980	200,000 people demonstrate in Kwangju city; city is sealed off by government troops. Army vehicles are commandeered by the citizens and obtain arms from police stations and army stockpiles; army retreats from city; telephone services is cut.
May 22 1980	Pentagon announces it has released four battalions of Korean troops (20 th Division) for use in suppressing Kwangju demonstrations.
May 26,27	Citizens in Kwangju appeal to the U.S. government to assist in negotiating a truce. U.S. State Department declines to mediate, stating "We recognize that a situation of total disorder and disruption in a major city cannot be allowed to go on indefinitely."
August 16 1980	President Choi resigns the presidency.
August 27 1980	Chun is elected President by the National Conference on Unification, the South Korean electoral college.

March 3 1981	Chun officially takes office as President.
June 29 1987	In response to nationwide demonstrations by Koreans demanding reforms, Roh, (Chun's chosen successor for President) announces acceptance of direct presidential election and other reforms.
Dec. 16 1990	Roh elected President with 36.6% of the popular vote.
Jan. 22 1990	After Roh's ruling party loses its majority in the National Assembly, Kim Young Sam and Kim Jong Pil announce the merger of their opposition parties with the ruling party, forming the Democratic Liberal Party ("DLP").
Dec. 18 1992	Kim Young Sam elected President with 42% of the popular vote.
Feb. 24 1993	Kim inaugurated as first civilian president in over 30 years.
June 3 1993	In response to calls that past presidents should be charged for their roles in military coup and Kwangju crackdown, Kim says that people should let "history be the judge."
Oct. 29 1994	Seoul Prosecutor's Office concludes that December 12 military takeover constituted military insurrection, but chooses to suspend prosecution.

Jan. 20 1995	Constitutional Court concludes that, under Article 84 of the Constitution, the statute of limitations must be suspended for crimes because a president is not criminally prosecutable while in office.
July 18 1995	Seoul Prosecutor's Office announces the state has "no authority to prosecute the leaders of a successful coup," and it cannot charge the former Presidents for the May 18th incident.
July 24 1995	Former President Roh arrested after confessing to having amassed about 500 billion won (roughly \$630 million) in slush funds while in office.
Nov. 16 1995	President Kim announces that he will direct his ruling party to enact a special law (Special Act) to prosecute those involved in the Dec. 12 and May 18 incidents.
Nov. 24 1995	Former President Chun arrested for his role in the Dec. 12th rebellion.
Dec. 3 1995	National Assembly passes May 18th Special Act (notice the irony of the date).
Dec. 19 1995	Special Act promulgated. Chun and Roh charged with military insurrection for roles in Dec.

	12, 1979 rebellion.
Jan. 23 1996	Trial of Chun and Roh for military mutiny and treason begins.
March 11 1996	Chun convicted and sentenced to death; Roh convicted and sentenced to 22-and-a-half year sentence.
August 26 1996	Appeals Court commutes Chun's death sentence to life in prison; Roh's sentence reduced to 17 years.

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