

TRANSCENDING *MINJOK*: HOW REDEFINING NATION PAVED THE WAY TO KOREAN DEMOCRATIZATION

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Introduction

The Republic of Korea (or South Korea) is commonly known for the metamorphosis from a war-devastated rural economy in 1953 to a world-class exporter of computer chips and oil tankers. South Korea became a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1996. While the international business sector marvelled at the *Miracle on the Han* during the 1970s and the 1980s, little attention was given to the human costs to the Korean people. Throughout the “economic miracle,” a vast majority of the population lived under a regime of severe political and economic dictatorship.

However, a powerful popular movement succeeded in ending decades of military dictatorship in Korea in the 1980s, and bringing about a democratically elected government. University students were key actors in this democratization movement, serving not only as coordinators, but becoming directly involved in a variety of grassroots activities. Several thousand student militants interrupted their studies and took great risks in factories as disguised workers, while others made themselves available in the countryside. But most importantly, student leaders established new ideological parameters aimed at reclaiming the government-controlled discourse on nation (*minjok*) and democracy. Until the late 1970s, the students had failed to produce a comprehensive discourse on Korean democracy which was different enough from the government’s version to make a compelling case for regime change. Many of the issues raised by student activists had been related to civil liberties, but the Park Chung-hee regime (1961-1979) portrayed the students’ struggles for democracy as Communist conspiracies, while Park maintained the dictatorship in the guise of a “Korean style democracy.” This essay argues that the student movements during the 1980s were successful in articulating a convincing explanation for the sufferings of Korea and in redefining the nation with the people as its leading agents. The students worked hard at shifting the discourse about the nation from *minjok* to *minjung* (the masses) in the context of democratizing Korea.¹ This transformation challenged Koreans’ view of their country’s

¹ *Minjok* and *minjung* derived from Chinese. While the original meaning of “jok” in *minjok* was “tribe” sharing a common ancestor, “jok” is now more generally used to designate a race, or ethnic group, e.g. “mong-jok,” meaning Mongolian race. When “jok” is combined with “min.” (people), as in “*minjok*,” the word becomes loaded with a heavily racial character. It refers to the Korean “nation,” but puts a strong emphasis on the Korean people’s sharing of common blood and a common ancestor, Tan’gun. It is an emotionally loaded term which has been used with great effect to call for the Korean people’s absolute and unconditional love and loyalty for the nation. “*Minjung*,” is a combination of “min” (people) and “jung” (mass), and therefore refers to The students worked hard at shifting the discourse about the nation from *minjok* to *minjung* (the masses) in the context of democratizing Korea.¹ This transformation challenged

recent history and of their government. The students essentially rewrote history from the perspective of the *minjung*, denouncing the dictatorship and shedding new light on U.S. imperialist policies, the exploitation of Koreans and the division of the Korean peninsula.

Attempting to redefine “nation” was an enormous and dangerous task. The Park Chung-hee government had essentially appropriated the concept of *minjok*, and President Park consistently referred to *minjok*. The term carried a great deal of legitimacy because of its association with Korean nationalistic movements of the late nineteenth century and independence movements under the Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945). Park’s two main objectives were economic development and national security, and in order to achieve these goals, he appealed to the *minjok* sentiments of Koreans. As a result of the Korean War (1950-1953) and the strident anti-Communist propaganda during the post-1945 period, *minjok* gradually acquired an anti-Communist flavor. The government’s association of the early independence movements with its efforts to fight Communism through manipulation of the discourse on *minjok* made it difficult for the students to question the fundamental legitimacy of the government’s plans. Until the late 1970s, the students challenged the government on its record regarding violations of civil liberties, but not on *minjok* or on its definition of national welfare.

There were obviously problems with the government’s association of *minjok* with anti-communism. Korean Communists had been a core element of the nationalist movement for the independence of Korea during Japanese colonial rule in the first half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, antagonizing North Korea was inconsistent with the concept of *minjok* which assumed the racial unity of the Korean people. However, these contradictions were overruled by the sense of emergency and threat to national security generated by the Cold War and the division of Korea.

It took an incident of the magnitude of the Kwangju massacre in May 1980 to question the government’s contention that its policies were implemented in the best interest of *minjok*. With the apparent approval of the U.S. government, the Korean military’s special forces violently and senselessly suppressed a popular uprising in the city of Kwangju that was calling for democracy. The uprising had been provoked by General Chun Doo-hwan’s imposition of martial law upon his coup after Park Chung-hee’s assassination in 1979. Although the peoples’ challenge to the dictatorship failed, it was instrumental in transforming the democratization movement. Instead of trying to reclaim the concept of *minjok*, which was still solidly entrenched in Cold War mentality, the students strove to shift the discourse from *minjok* to *minjung*. After a decade of cooperation, the students had become aware of the ordeal of the Korean workers who had been excluded from the interest and the welfare of the *minjok* trumpeted by the government. The significance of national interest and autonomy that was central to the *minjok* ideology gradually unraveled once the students exposed the Korean government’s

Koreans’ view of their country’s the “mass of ordinary people.” The term “*minjung*” was associated with dissatisfied crowds of common people as early as the Tonghak peasants rebellions in the late nineteenth century. The later meaning of *minjung* was profoundly re-shaped by the 1980s student movements which added a socialist character to the image of the nationalistic and righteous *minjung*. I am grateful to Chol W. Kim, my father-in-law, Korean translator and linguist, for clarifying the etymologies of these two key concepts.

reliance upon Japanese and American economic and military powers. And importantly, the Kwangju massacre had shaken the view that the U.S. was on the side of democracy and the Korean people.

One of the students' main objectives was to give *minjung*--the people--a prominent place in the history of Korea, in the independence and liberation movements and in post-war economic development. Moreover, re-writing Korea's contemporary history from a *minjung* perspective allowed students to bypass the border drawn across the Korean peninsula in 1945, and to include the struggles led by Koreans in the north as well. Contrary to the official discourse, the *minjung* liberation ideology argued that Korea's enemies were not those north of the 38th Parallel, but rather those in South Korea, Japan, and America who profited from the labor of the Korean workers. It demanded a concrete reflection on the impact of economic development in Korea on the *minjung*'s welfare, and on the autonomy of Korea's own domestic affairs, as well as economic independence.

In the first part of this essay, I examine the meaning of *minjok* (nation) in the official discourse by looking at Park Chung-hee's speeches, lectures, and books, and explain how *minjok* became a concept so tightly associated with the government's anti-Communist propaganda that the students needed to generate nationalistic sentiments based on alternative criteria. In the second part of the essay, numerous students' declarations of the 1980s show how they reconceptualized "nation," and how they believed a *minjung* approach to socio-politics and economics was more genuinely in the best interests of the nation.

Enforcing the Discourse of *Minjok* Democracy

Democracy had a powerful psychological effect on the people during the regime of Park Chung-hee because it was constantly opposed to Communism in official discourse, and it offered legitimacy to the government both domestically and abroad. Park merged democracy and nationalism into so-called Korean-style democracy.² In this new democracy, the people were expected less to participate in the socio-political realm than to commit to the economic development of the nation. He entrusted the leadership of the democratic revolution to the "new generations composed of soldiers, students and intellectuals."³ The Park government discourse manufactured a Korean national identity that expounded Korean "traditions" of self-sacrifice, diligence, obedience, and sense of duty. The use of nation (*minjok*) and nationalism (*minjokchuŭi*) was pervasive in the government's rhetoric, designed to rally the peoples' support for its economic policies during the dictatorship. The people were compelled to work very hard and make sacrifices in order to re-build a strong and powerful nation.

Riding an initial wave of popular support for his military revolution, Park strove to convince the Korean people that his leadership would allow them to retrieve economic

² Park Chung-hee, *Our Nation's Path: Ideology of Social Reconstruction* (Seoul: Dong-A Publishing Company, 1964), 199-210; *The Country, The Revolution and I* (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1970), 184-85; *Korea Reborn* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1979), 59-65; "A Training Ground for Korean Democracy" in *Saemaul: Korea's New Community Movement* (Seoul: Korea Textbook Co., 1979), 203-09.

³ Park, *Our Nation's Path*, 117.

and political independence. He promised to carry out economic plans in order to realize a “Miracle on the Han River” because a “free community cannot exist without economic self-sufficiency to guarantee the people’s right of survival,” and he acknowledged that this was “the only way to gain superiority over Communism.”⁴ Park’s stated plan consisted of a three-stage fight for self-reliance and national self-respect: Unite for the common good; liberate the people from poverty through a self-reliant economic development; and build a healthy, “Koreanized” democracy.⁵

This discourse on self-reliance contained significant inherent contradictions, but because it was associated with *minjok* and democracy, it was absorbed by the general public. “Poverty, hunger and low incomes are the most serious obstacles to the establishment of modern, liberal democracy in [Korea],” Park argued.⁶ Indeed, the Syngman Rhee government (1948-1960) had been inept at reconstructing the Korean economy after the end of the civil war, and poverty was still rampant in Korea. The revolutionary government decided to make economic development its number one priority “over combat or politics.”⁷ Political independence would remain elusive without economic independence.⁸ Park blamed the disastrous economic policies of the two previous republics for what he described as a “monstrous, chronic disease” that spread into all aspects of Korean society by “encouraging and creating laziness, corruption, vanity and luxury.”⁹ According to Park, this disease had polluted the national spirit: “Our traditional simplicity, our national diligence, and our straight-forwardness have all disappeared.”¹⁰ Although the introduction of “American things, Western things, [and] Japanese things” were responsible for the decay of the national spirit, Park insisted that this could be undone with appropriate efforts and sacrifice. Wasn’t it time to reinstate what was “ours” and “things of Korea?”¹¹

Hwarang and National Pride

It was time for Koreans to embrace once again the worthy spirit and traditions of their ancestors in order to accomplish this revolution. Park declared that the essence of this traditional spirit was thoroughly represented by the *hwarang* [lit. “flowering youth” or “flower of manhood”], a military institution of virtuous young men that had flourished in Silla during the Three Kingdoms period (57 B.C.-668 A.D.). The *Silla Kukki* (Record of Silla), which is no longer extant, is said to have quoted Ko-um, a private envoy from Tang China to Silla during the fourth year of King Hyegong’s reign (768 A.D.): “The *hwarang* were chosen from the handsome sons of the nobles, and their faces were made up, and they were well-dressed. They were called *hwarang* and were highly respected by their countrymen.”¹² The origin and function of the *hwarang* is cloaked in mystery, but

⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁵ Ibid., 119-121.

⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁷ Park, *Country, the Revolution and I*, 29.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 36-38.

¹² Yi Kidong, *Han’guk minjok munhwa taebaek kwa sajön* (Encyclopaedia of Korean Culture), Vol. 25

Park's call for the revival of the *hwarang* spirit served to establish his own legitimacy in many ways.

Although he came from a military yangban family (*mubang*), Park faced centuries of Confucian doctrine inherited from China that had placed the army under the control of civil rule during the last Chosŏn dynasty (1392-1910), and which made a military dictatorship questionable. In an obvious oversight of these past six centuries of civilian government, Park's reference to the mystical *hwarang* of the Silla period in his *Our Nation's Path* was intended to root Koreans' nationalistic fiber in the spirit of military heroes and selfless patriots, and to present the *hwarang* as models for the current project of re-building Korea.

Park contended that subsequent national heroes had been imbued with the same *hwarang* spirit, such as Admiral Yi Sun-sin who sank numerous Japanese ships during the Hideyoshi invasions of the late sixteenth century, and Ch'oe Che-u, the founder of Tonghak (Eastern Learning) and leader of the Tonghak Peasant Rebellion in 1894-95 whose mottoes were "Reject Westerners, reject the Japanese" and "Save the people and remove tyranny."¹³ To be sure, Park's choice of a *military* hero, Admiral Yi, and a *peasant* leader, Ch'oe Che-u, as icons of the "traditional and national spirit" of the *hwarang* was no coincidence, because it gave Park's local military family background the status of a patriotic national leader equal to that of the *hwarang*, and helped legitimize his military regime in terms of Korean traditions and history.

Throughout his presidency, Park's discourse on how to develop the country continued to invoke the virtues of self-sacrifice and purity demonstrated by the *hwarang*. Clearly, Park was constructing a *minjok* identity in which prominent virtues were described as the foundation of the unification of Korea under Silla, but also conveniently bolstered the support for his regime and its objectives of sacrifice, discipline, wisdom, bravery, pure and military spirit. The historical references he chose were not random. South Korea, like Silla, had the opportunity to re-unify the Korean peninsula by emulating the same virtues, and to "develop such a splendid culture," that would make Koreans proud once again.¹⁴

An anti-Communist Korean Democracy

From the outset, Park Chung-hee made no secret that he had qualms about the establishment of democracy in Korea, but he had, at least, to pay lip service to the principles and ideology of democracy even though his vision of the nation did not correspond with it. In *The Country, the Revolution and I*, Park wrote:

We have ourselves experienced how Western democratic institutions do not harmonize with the underdeveloped conditions of Korea and have in fact caused deleterious effects. We had scarcely set ourselves free from the restrictions of feudal society when we were suddenly tossed into a completely democratic society. This was too abrupt and unnatural. Therefore, we have to

(Sŏngnamsi: Han'guk Chŏngsin Munhwa Yŏn'guwŏn, 1992), 214.

¹³ Park Chung-hee, *Our Nation's Path*, 90-91.

¹⁴ Yi Sŏnggŭn, *Hwarangdowa Samguk T'ongil* (The Way of the *Hwarang* and the Unification of the Three Kingdoms) (Seoul: Sejong Taewang Kinyŏm Saŏphoe, 1974), 15.

establish a new system, whatever the form it may take.¹⁵

In fact, democracy hardly appeared in the Revolutionary Pledges he promulgated as the immediate principles of action. These principles defined anti-Communism as the first purpose of government, and included the reconstruction of an independent national economy, national unification, the strengthening of ties with “Free World” allies, and the fostering of a “national democratic spirit.”¹⁶ Park was less interested in democratic institutions than he was in a “democratic spirit.” The *idea* or spirit of democracy was attractive from a utilitarian perspective because it had a definite appeal for the recognition of South Korea in the “Free World.” Furthermore, as government propaganda consistently posed democracy as the antithesis of Communism, the democratic idea could serve as a catalyst to rally the support of the Korean population for his government and against Communism.

The legitimacy of the democratic objective allowed the Park government to regiment Koreans’ lives for the national interests. The official discourse managed to blur the lines between democracy, national interests, and anti-Communism. However, Park was reluctant to establish democratic institutions in which the views of the people were represented because he believed these institutions had been the roots of political and social corruption in Korea, and had contributed to the degradation of what he called the “national spirit.”

Until the very end of his presidency, Park insisted on the need to maintain an indigenous character in a democracy suited to Korea. He contended that Koreans needed to emphasize the traditional principle of harmony between individuals and the state.¹⁷ And to further drive home the point that democracy was a national endeavor, Park evoked the martyrs who sacrificed themselves for the nation throughout Korea’s long history, “From time immemorial, the Korean people, without necessarily going through the process of political party or social pressure group membership, have successfully practiced the principle of identifying individual concern with the cause of the nation.”¹⁸ Democracy was a worthy aspiration which required sacrifices, loyalty and devotion to the state.

National Security and Anti-Communism

The working classes would not easily tolerate decades of abuses and exploitation for lofty “democratic” ideals if the government did not exert other pressures. On the one hand, Park resorted heavily to the national security law and the threat of Communism to suppress dissidence and activities deemed sympathetic to North Korea. On the other hand, he appealed to the people’s sense of loyalty to the *minjok* ideal in order to legitimize his use of authoritarian methods. The use of *minjok* in this instance was inherently problematic because, despite the racial component of *minjok*, which made the North Korean people an intrinsic part of the Korean nation, it quietly excluded Koreans living north of the DMZ from the *minjok* community because of their ideological

¹⁵ Park, *The Country, the Revolution and I*, 55.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

¹⁷ Park, *Korea Reborn*, 62.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

inclination.

Furthermore, accusations that North Koreans were treasonous in terms of *minjok* was also a difficult argument to present because throughout the Japanese colonial period, northern Koreans had offered a far more active resistance against the colonial authorities than their southern counterparts.¹⁹ While North Koreans were part of the *minjok*, according to its etymological definition, it became clear that Park's view of the *minjok* community excluded those who embraced Communism. The Park administration managed to keep a lid on this contradiction with powerful repressive measures and a propaganda machine that constantly brandished the specter of the Korean War and the Cold War in order to demonize North Korea. It also heightened the sense of emergency and danger to facilitate the directed implementation of Park's economic plans and the militarization of Korean society. Whether discussing history, economic plans, defense, or education, Park's public statements were imbued with a strongly nationalistic aura that demanded unquestioned loyalty to the nation.

However, national reunification remained a thorny issue because the Korean people, particularly students, could feel the tension between the appeal to *minjok* sentiments and the Park regime's bellicose rhetoric against North Korea. Accordingly, the government systematically aligned the reunification issue with national security, but periodically--to show good will--the official discourse regretted the North Korean authorities' failure to commit to a peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula, and encouraged them "to return to the national conscience."²⁰ In a message addressed to "Korean brethren in North Korea and other Communist-ruled areas" in 1968, Park extended his prayers to Koreans who lived under Communist persecution, and stressed that Korea was "now being cultivated as a bastion of freedom and peace, as well as [of] the struggle to repel Communist aggression."²¹

In order to save democracy and freedom from Communist aggression, Park ordered an enlargement of military capabilities, and announced, on the 20th ROK Army Day in 1968, that Korea had reached its objective of a 600,000 man standing army, in addition to the 2.5 million-man Homeland Reserve Forces.²² His speech, entitled "The Anti-Communist Freedom Crusade," praised the coming of age of the ROK army and its role in "defending the democratic anti-Communist fatherland with invincible spirit." In a tone reminiscent of the U. S. justifications for the My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War, Park insisted that the anti-Communist struggle for democracy would be led as a crusade, and he expected the full support of the Korean population:

Today I emphasize again that you people should take charge of construction, not to mention the economic production which is the motive power of national defense. I also remind you that it is absolutely necessary for you, with diligence, unity and patience, to support and encourage our soldiers who are

¹⁹ Shin Gi-wook, *Peasant Protest and Social Change in Colonial Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 109.

²⁰ Park Chung-hee, "Let us Develop a Correct View of National History," in *Toward Peaceful Unification: Selected Speeches* (Seoul: Kwangmyong Publishing Company, 1976), 87. This was a commemorative address in observance of the National Foundation Day on October 3, 1973.

²¹ Park Chung-hee, "Until the Day of Our Territorial Unification," in *Major Speeches by Korea's Park Chung Hee*, comp. Shin Bum Shik, (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 1970), 246.

²² Park, "The Anti-Communist Freedom Crusade," in *Ibid.*, 273.

made up of our younger generations, and that your duty and mission for our national defense is long-lasting, and so is our ordeal.²³

The ordeal was only in its initial stages for the Korean population. The Park government used national security and national defense to rationalize the new wave of authoritarianism and the militarization of Korean society throughout the 1970s.

Through a subtle combination of ideological ploys, appeals to national pride and “self-help,” the re-writing of the national history, economic promises, and the heightening of the sense of national threat and emergency, the Park government succeeded in hijacking the powerful meaning of *minjok* to secure its otherwise fragile legitimacy. Until the late 1970s, the dissidence and student movements protested against the government’s abuses, but failed to secure widespread popular support because people’s perception of the dissidents’ righteousness remained subject to the government’s rhetoric on national values and character (*minjok*). Only the Kwangju Uprising in May 1980 convinced the students that it was imperative to initiate an alternative discourse, and develop an entirely new ideology if they wanted to bring about democratization in Korea.

Minjung Nationalism: The Students’ Reaction

The students had a gigantic task to perform to gain the support of the Korean population. They had to roll back decades of anti-Communist propaganda and education impressed on people that the all-legitimate *minjok* had blinded. In many ways, *minjok* was filled with contradictions, and had been utilized to legitimize policies that benefited the national interests rather than the people. The media outlets, the propaganda machine, the educational system, etc. were under the government’s control. How could the students succeed in bringing down the fraudulent dichotomy that forced Koreans to choose between North Korean Communism and South Korean “democracy?” Clearly, trying to undermine the near sacred status of *minjok* by simply criticizing the government’s deployment of the term could have backfired. Students would then have been viewed as traitors and Communists by the general population. The government systematically accused any dissidents of being Communist or sponsored by Communists.

The students radically changed their objectives in the aftermath of the Kwangju massacre in May 1980. They modified their discourse in a process that they themselves referred to as “ideologization” (*inyŏmhwa*), deciding it was essential to redefine what democracy, nation and the national interests meant, not in terms of a lofty, nationalistic project, but in terms of concrete economic and socio-political improvements for the *minjung* (people).

Rewriting Korean History and Identity

In the course of the 1980s, *minjung* became the ideological staple of the student and dissidence movements. It permeated countless aspects of the opposition movement against the Chun Doo-hwan dictatorship (1980-1987) that followed the Park dictatorship

²³ Ibid., 270-273.

that started in the mid-nineteenth century. They were mainly grassroots movements that emerged at a time when Korea was struggling to define a modern national identity in order to cope with the increasing pressures exerted by foreign imperialist powers such as Japan and the Western nation states.²⁴

While it is interesting to consider which people might have made up the *minjung*, it is more important to find out how the students proceeded to redefine Korea's national identity under *minjung* terms. During the 1980s, the students concerned themselves with the overthrow of the military regime, the reunification of the nation, and particularly the socio-economic welfare of the population. This shift in focus both stemmed from, and had tremendous implications for the way they defined the "nation" because the *minjung* ideology encouraged the people to be active participants in an "imagined community" whose boundaries were redrawn according to socio-economic issues. This transformation found a sympathetic audience in a population shocked by the state's violent crackdown in Kwangju in May 1980. To the students, this tragedy revealed that the Korean government had scant respect for the people's views and lives; that the United States supported this government while disregarding the people's call for democracy; and that if reunification and democracy were not going to be implemented from above, the people would have to struggle for them every step of the way. Since *minjok* had so frequently been invoked and defined in Park Chung-hee's speeches to the "nation," it had lost some of its racial sacredness and appeal. The students searched for an alternative subjectivity that did not have ties to the dictatorships.

The new *minjung* approach taken by the students was outlined in a series of debates remembered as the "*murim-hangnim* dispute."²⁵ In the immediate aftermath of the Kwangju Uprising, Seoul National University student activists initiated debates to discuss why this massive popular uprising had failed to engender a democracy. These discussions addressed issues regarding the position and the role of the student movements, the view of the reform movement thereafter, and the shape of the organizations that would carry it out.²⁶ These deliberations concluded that there was an urgent need for better organization and coordination among dissidence movements (*chojikhwa*), and a fresh ideology (*inyŏmhwa*), which would stress the protection of the people's rights. In addition, popularization of the dissidence movement (*taejunghwa*) was a key component of the students' project of establishing what they eventually called a "*minjung* democracy."

At the center of this fresh ideological movement was harsh criticism of the role redefining social and economic relations, giving a different meaning to popular culture, and rewriting history. As the successive authoritarian regimes had reinforced *minjokchui* (nationalism) as a tool for legitimizing their rule, the students transformed the concept of

²⁴ Shin Yong-ha, a prominent scholar on Korean nationalism, traces the roots of "modern Korean nationalism" (which he contrasts with pre-modern nationalism, as he argues that, unlike European nations, the formation of the nation had taken place in Korea in ancient times) to the Tonghak and Enlightenment thoughts of the mid-nineteenth century, as a response to the foreign threats. Shin Yong-ha, *Modern Korean History and Nationalism*, (Seoul: Jimoondang Publishing Company, 2000), 3-5.

²⁵ "*Murim*" means literally "no forest" whereas "*hangnim*" means "student forest." "*Murim*" refers to an incident involving Seoul National University protesting students which was suppressed and investigated by the police, but yielded no specific organization. Kang Sin-ch'ŏl, et al., *80-nyŏndae haksaeŋ undongsa* (History of the 1980s Student Movements) (Seoul: Hyŏngsŏngsa, 1993), 20-23.

²⁶ Kang, *80-nyŏndae haksaeŋ undongsa*, 24.

played by the United States in Korea during the twentieth century. In selective reinterpretations of historical events, the students described the damning record of Washington's policies in Korea and its harmful impact on the Korean people. Hitherto, the U.S. had been widely viewed as the liberator of Korea in 1945, and the American military occupation until 1948 had been mostly remembered as a necessary inconvenience to allow for stabilizing the country and holding democratic elections. In a 1982, students at Korea University provided a radically different description of the U.S. military occupation, arguing that

... the essence of the three years of U.S. military government can be found in the thesis that the American policy [in Korea] was specifically related to its Soviet Union policy in the Far East, and catered to American interests. It is undeniable that this policy poured poison on the roots of Korean democracy.²⁷

The declaration alleged that the U.S. military government had transferred more than 80 percent of the Japanese owned industry units across the country to pro-Japanese comprador forces. The students concluded that this had annihilated the foundation for the autonomous revival of the Korean economy. Furthermore, by backing up pro-American conservatives in Korea, Washington had transferred the political and economic power to them, and made possible the establishment of an anti-*minjung* authoritarian government in Korea.²⁸

The position of the United States became precarious among students' circles. Re-examining the post-war period, the students concluded that the U.S. had ignored the wishes of the *minjung*, and instead permitted the surviving capitalistic forces from the Japanese colony to re-align their exploitative infrastructure with the vested interests of American monopoly capital without suffering significant losses themselves. The students made clear that they believed that the U.S. had intervened in Korea to protect its own strategic interests, not because the U.S. government cared for the welfare of the Korean people. They declared:

What did the three years of U.S. military government after the liberation leave us with? The U.S. advanced into Korea as an occupying force, not as an ally. America has viewed Korea merely in military and strategic terms, completely overlooking our 36 year-long struggle against Japanese imperialism, and our *minjung*'s ardent desire to establish an independent, unified national state.²⁹

In the process of revising the role of America in Korea in the twentieth century, students redefined their own past and destiny. *Minjung* nationalism allowed an alternative role for Korean youths who were loyal to their nation but not to their leaders. Instead of Park's militaristic and aristocratic *hwarang*, Korean students could identify themselves as heirs to the *minjung* struggle begun during the nineteenth-century Tonghak Peasant *minjung* into a powerful source of cultural and socio-political ideology to mobilize public

²⁷ Kodae panp'asyo minju hagu iltong (Korea [Koryŏ] University Antifascist Democratic Student Union), "Panp'asyo minju hagu siguk sŏnŏn" (Declaration on the State of Affairs by the Anti Fascist Democratic Students), May 14, 1982 in *80-nyŏndae han'guk sahoewa haksae undong*, 317.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 316.

sentiments in South Korea. They characterized themselves as the heirs of the *minjung* struggle begun during the Tonghak Peasant Rebellion in the late nineteenth century, and of the anti-Japanese independence March First Movement in 1919. To them, the *minjung* had been persecuted and crushed by foreign powers and by the government throughout the twentieth century. Indeed, as Namhee Lee shows in her recent book, intellectuals and students involved in the *minjung* movement struggled with the anxious perception that Korean people were not the agents of Korean history.³⁰ They wanted to vindicate the historical role of the *minjung* as the rightful owners of the land, and as the driving force of democracy and national reunification.³¹ By identifying new national heroes, and giving historical agency to the *minjung*, the students rewrote the national history, and provided an alternative to the official discourse. Most importantly, the legitimization of *minjung* created a space for dissenting views outside the inflexible dichotomy of the government discourse.

As with its *minjok* counterpart, *minjung* has had a fluid definition. Kenneth Wells points out that the *minjung* movement has historically been concerned with nationalistic projects, including the peasant-led Tonghak Rebellion during the late nineteenth century, and the national liberation movement against the Japanese colonial rule in the first half of the twentieth century.³² *Minjung* literally means “the masses” or “the people,” but it is different from the North Korean term for “the people” translated “Inmin.”³³ Scholars have found it extremely difficult to identify what section of the population represented the *minjung*. For Pak Hyŏnch’ae, an economic analyst, *minjung* were the workers, farmers, and urban poor who had fallen victim to the capitalist system.³⁴ For another prominent scholar of the *minjung* movement, Han Wansang, *minjung* were “the various social groups who [were] excluded from the political, economic, and cultural means of power in society.”³⁵ *Minjung* movements began as an early form of populist nationalism Rebellion and the anti-Japanese March First Movement for independence in 1919. To them, the *minjung* had been persecuted and crushed by foreign powers and by the government throughout the twentieth century. They wanted to vindicate the historical role of the *minjung* as the rightful owners of the land and the agents of democracy and national reunification.³⁶ They argued that, in an oppressed, developing country, it was the

³⁰ Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

³¹ “Chŏnhangnyŏn p’asyo hŏnbŏp ch’ŏlp’ye t’ujaeng wiwŏnhoe mit sammin undong t’anap chŏji t’ujaeng wiwŏnhoe sŏngmyŏngsŏ – urinŏn we nongsŏngŭl hanŏnga?” (Declaration of the Chŏnhangnyŏn struggle committee for the abolition of the fascist constitution and the struggle committee to prevent the repression of the Sammin movement – why we are protesting), December 18, 1985, in *80-nyŏndae han’guk sahoewa haksae undong* (Korean society and the student movement of the 1980s), ed. Han Yong (hereafter cited as *80-nyŏndae han’guk sahoewa haksae undong*) (Seoul: Ch’ŏngnyŏnsa, 1989), 363.

³² Kenneth M. Wells, introduction to *South Korea’s Minjung Movement: The Culture of Politics and Dissidence* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1995), 1.

³³ *Inmin* is a favorite word to refer to “the people” in North Korea because it has traditionally been used to contrast the people and the ruling class.

³⁴ Kim Hyung-A, “Minjung Socioeconomic Responses to State-led Industrialization,” in *South Korea’s Minjung Movement*, 39.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “Chŏnhangnyŏn p’asyo hŏnbŏp ch’ŏlp’ye t’ujaeng wiwŏnhoe mit sammin undong t’anap chŏji t’ujaeng wiwŏnhoe sŏngmyŏngsŏ – urinŏn we nongsŏngŭl hanŏnga?” (Declaration of the Chŏnhangnyŏn struggle committee for the abolition of the fascist constitution and the struggle committee to prevent the repression of the Sammin movement – why we are protesting), December 18, 1985, in *80-nyŏndae han’guk sahoewa*

youth's responsibility to lead in the development of a national history as members of the *minjung*.

Minjung ideology allowed the students to promulgate an alternative to Park's *minjok* nationalism, which sought to define Korean subjectivity as rooted in the militaristic history of the *hwarang* and other military figures. The students' deployment of *minjung* challenged Park's monopoly on nationalist discourse by setting up an equally--if not more--legitimate historical narrative and positing a national identity rooted in resistance to oppression from the grassroots.

Defining the Minjung's Enemy

After establishing that American policy towards Korea had been imperialist from day one, student activists revisited subsequent events in this new light. One anti-fascism student group at Korea University accused the United States of having turned a blind eye to Park Chung-hee's coup d'état in 1961 and of having forced Korea once again under Japanese economic domination by supporting the normalization agreement signed by the Park regime with Japan in 1965, in utter disregard of the nation's desire.³⁷ Ultimately, students viewed American and Japanese capital as the basic cause for the Korean *minjung*'s economic and socio-political sufferings, and believed that a true, national *minjung* democracy would only emerge "after driving out U.S. imperialism, overthrowing the fascist [Chun Doo-hwan] government which depends on it, and dismantling monopoly capitalism."³⁸ Washington had alternately given and withdrawn its support for "puppet regimes" from Syngman Rhee to Chun Doo-hwan according to its own interests. Students at Seoul National University made it clear that they believed the U.S. had systematically helped repress the nationalistic liberation struggle led by the Korean *minjung*: "The history of the Korean peninsula since the late nineteenth century is a history of exploitation by American and Japanese imperialists, and it is the history of the fierce struggle of the *minjung* against them."³⁹ With indictments of such nature, the students successfully set the scene for a legitimate assault on the *minjung*'s enemy: the arms and fists of the beast that repressed the *minjung* belonged to the Chun government, but the body who benefited from it and the head who gave the orders were none other than American capitalism and imperialism. Most importantly, this new rationalization gave legitimacy to their harsh criticism of the government for the Korean population. Since the Korean government's discourse had appropriated *minjokchuui* (nationalism) for so long, the students appealed to Koreans' "populist nationalism" or "*minjung* nationalism" in order to be able to criticize the government's policies without being seen

haksaeng undong, 363.

³⁷ Kodae panp'asyo minju hagu iltong (Korea [Koryō] University Antifascist Democratic Student Union), "Panp'asyo minju hagu siguk sŏnŏn" (Declaration on the State of Affairs by the Anti Fascist Democratic Students), May 14, 1982 in *80-nyŏndae han'guk sahoewa haksae undong*, 317.

³⁸ Chŏn'guk panje panp'asyo minjok minju haksae yŏnmaeng ch'angnip sŏnŏnmun (Declaration of foundation of the national anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, national democratic student alliance), April 29, 1986 in *80-nyŏndae han'guk sahoewa haksae undong*, 371.

³⁹ Seoul taehakkyo panmi chajuhwa pan'pasyo minjuhwa t'ujaeng wiwŏnhoe sŏnŏnmun (Declaration by the Seoul National University Struggle Committee for anti-American independence and anti-fascist democratization), April 10, 1986 in *80-nyŏndae han'guk sahoewa haksae undong*, 366.

by the people as unpatriotic. Thereafter, their accusations of the government and the U.S., and their explanations of the reasons for the Korean people's torment found increasing resonance among the population at large. As the following paragraphs will show, the students described the Chun government as an anti-*minjung*, anti-*minjok* agent for domestic and foreign exploiting capitalists.

Forging a Minjung Ideology

The radicalization of the student movement with its new ideology took a dramatic turn immediately after the 5.18 defeat in Kwangju.⁴⁰ The “*murim-hangnim* debates” in 1980-1981 yielded two major groups of students, and shaped distinct strategies and ideologies that affected the student movements throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s. The *hangnim* group (“Student Forest”) led the struggle in the early 1980s whereas the *murim* group (“No Forest”) came to the fore of the scene later in the 1980s. These debates eventually encompassed all the universities in Korea and were the genesis of *minjung* ideology and identity, and laid the foundation for the strategies and structures for a mass popularization of the democracy movement.

The *hangnim* group, who had lost confidence in the government's willingness to guarantee the welfare of the people, was a strong proponent of the “Direct Struggle Theory” (*chikchŏp t'ujaengnon*). According to this student group, the military dictatorship had managed to silence the democratic movement, and even the press had fallen under the control of the government, plunging the entire nation into a depression of defeatism. Therefore, they argued, the student movement had to go beyond its traditional responsibility for “raising the issues,” and take a leading and active role in “solving issues.” They planned to lead the struggle against the government, and prepare the foundation for a mass movement.⁴¹ This constituted a significant departure from the historical and elitist role of the student movements as they identified themselves with the *minjung*, particularly the working classes. Accordingly, the character of the students' slogans turned far more radical and violent after 1980. From “Repeal the Yusin dictatorship!” and “Park regime, resign!” the students now shouted “Crush the Fascist regime!” and “Overthrow the Chun Doo-hwan regime!” This new trend appeared also in the mimeographed anti-fascist leaflets the students distributed while carrying out rallies on campus. From 1980-81, many of the student flyers were “Anti-fascist Manifestoes” that addressed the goals of the student struggle, described the state of affairs in Korea, and promoted the strengthening of the students' ties with the *minjung* and particularly the labor movement.

The *hangnim* students' new emphasis on labor issues was manifest in the list of slogans the Democratic Students at Seoul National University (*Seouldae minju hag'u iltong*) issued in March 1981. The first three slogans were “Secure the three labor rights,” “Secure democratic labor unions,” and “Repeal the retrogressive revision of the labor-related laws.”⁴² In fact, from the early 1980s, consistent with this new vision, an

⁴⁰ Koreans refer to the Kwangju Uprising as 5.18 or the first day of the uprising: May 18.

⁴¹ Kang Sin-ch'öl, et al., *80-nyŏndae haksaeung undongsa*, 25.

⁴² Seouldae minju hagu ildong (Seoul National University democratic student brotherhood), “Panp'asyo minju t'ujaeng kuho” (Anti-fascist democratic struggle slogans), March 1981, in *80-nyŏndae han'guk*

increasing number of student activists went to factories as disguised workers. George Ogle and Hagen Koo both estimate that there were over three thousand student-turned-workers by the mid-1980s.⁴³ Through small group discussions, study and recreational activities, these students strove to promote class identity and consciousness among workers and help them organize labor unions. After long viewing workers as victims needy of their support, the *hangnim* students saw laborers as the subjects of history and therefore as powerful allies for social and political change.⁴⁴

Half of these student-turned-workers were women, who were mostly employed in medium-size factories.⁴⁵ The testimonies of two of these women shed some light onto the character and goals of the student movements. Nam Kyu-sŏn entered Sookmyung [Sungmyŏng] Women's University in Seoul in the early 1980s, and became involved in the student movements as most students did during that decade, with varying commitments. She said that many students did not know what democracy meant. As activists, their primary concern was whether or not they would "work" in factories. People respected the students because they knew how hard it was for them to get into college; it was especially difficult for those who came from the provinces and those who had managed to enter the most prestigious university in Korea, Seoul National University. According to Nam, "the workers were aware of the injustices they had to suffer, but they lacked something that would transform their frustration into a force for protest. This something came mostly from the students."⁴⁶

Yi Hye-gyŏng decided to drop out of college in 1985 in order to go to a factory disguised as a worker. She explained that up until college, she had had no political awareness or interest in politics. However, during her first college year, she was exposed to her mentor's discussions, and for the first time, she had the opportunity to see pictures from the 1980 Kwangju massacre, which were going around campus. These had a tremendous effect on her, and she started to read avidly and debate about social issues, imperialism, *minjung* history and socialism. For her, the role of the students was to help the workers organize labor unions, educating them on labor laws, and fostering a *minjung* identity.⁴⁷

Both Nam and Yi believed in direct action. Like them, many of their student comrades believed that their participation in the actual struggle and the personal trials and ordeals which they underwent under the Chun dictatorship only strengthened the student and *minjung* organizations.⁴⁸ The students' decisions to join the democratization movement off-campus exposed them to higher risks of facing the violent repression the Chun regime imposed on dissidents. If caught involved in illegal anti-government activities, students faced the danger of prison terms, forced conscription to the military for male students, and many were tortured. Numerous cases of torture in police custody were reported and denounced by the students during the 1980s. Furthermore, the trials of

sahoewa haksang undong, 301.

⁴³ George E. Ogle, *South Korea: Dissent Within the Economic Miracle* (New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1990), 99 and Hagen Koo, *Korean Workers: the Politics and Culture of Class Formation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 105.

⁴⁴ Hagen Koo, *Korean Workers*, 105-106.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴⁶ Nam Kyu-sŏn, interview by the author, February 2001.

⁴⁷ Yi Hye-gyŏng, interview by the author, February 2001.

⁴⁸ Kang Sin-ch'ŏl, et al. *80-nyŏndae haksang undongsa*, 25-26.

the incidents involving the National Democratic Student Federation (*Chŏn'guk haksæng minju yŏnmaeng*) and the National Democratic Labor Federation (*Chŏn'guk nodong minju yŏnmaeng*) in 1982 revealed to the public the particularly savage torture techniques used by the police: water torture, electric torture, piercing of thighs and vital points, etc. The students insisted that this was further evidence of the Chun regime's anti-*minjok* and anti-*minjung* character, and their sufferings bolstered the legitimacy of the democratic struggle.⁴⁹ In 1985, the National Democratic Student Federation (*Chŏn'guk haksæng minju yŏnmaeng*) condemned the government's intensification of repression under the University Stability Law, which led to the reported torture of at least four victims: Kim Keun-tae [Kim Kŭn-t'ae], Yi Ŭl-ho, and Hŏ In-hoe, as well as U Chong-wŏn, who died under torture.⁵⁰

Women activists were not spared from brutality. For instance, in 1986, a female student-turned-worker named Kwŏn In-suk had the courage to break a social taboo, and made public how she had been raped and tortured under police custody. Although she was later sentenced to a year and a half in prison for lying on her employment application, the story of her sexual assault triggered a public uproar and distress.⁵¹ Such exposures of government brutality helped earn the sympathy of the general population and further delegitimize the Chun regime.

Though the *hangnim* group's ideology of direct struggle gave the student movements an indispensable and physical impetus in the early 1980s, it would have remained incomplete without the gradual and adaptive approach that characterized the *murim* student group's struggle. According to the *murim* group, the May 1980 struggle had failed because the democratic movement lacked solid leadership and a large base within the masses. Therefore, rather than sacrificing themselves by focusing on political struggle, the student movements needed to achieve the support of the masses, and develop their own sense of leadership and democratic awareness. According to the *murim* group's "Theory of Sublimation of Struggle" (*t'ujaeng chiyangnon*), careful preparation and organization were the key elements.⁵² Such an approach was also less costly in times of harsh repression and no less productive.

In the 1980s, spreading information rapidly became a priority for student activists. The debacle of Kwangju demonstrated the power of the media, as well as the helplessness of those without a public voice. Since one of the students' main objectives was to spread their base, they began the movement by addressing the general student population to "popularize" (*taejunghwa*) its position. As early as fall 1980, student activists dramatically increased their printing of informational flyers.⁵³ They organized

⁴⁹ Kodaepanp'asyo minju hagu iltong (Korea [Koryŏ] University Antifascist Democratic Student Union), "Panp'asyo minju hagu siguk sŏnŏn" (Declaration on the State of Affairs by the Anti Fascist Democratic Students), May 14, 1982 in *80-nyŏndae han'guk sahoewa haksæng undong*, 315.

⁵⁰ Chŏnhangnyŏn p'asyo hŏnbŏp ch'ŏlp'ye t'ujaeng wiwŏnhoe mit sammin undong t'anap chŏji t'ujaeng wiwŏnhoe sŏngmyŏngsŏ – urinŭn we nongsŏngŭl hanŭnga? (Declaration of the Chŏnhangnyŏn struggle committee for the abolition of the fascist constitution and the struggle committee to prevent the repression of the Sammin movement – why we are protesting), December 18, 1985, in *80-nyŏndae han'guk sahoewa haksæng undong*, 362.

⁵¹ George E. Ogle, *South Korea: Dissent Within the Economic Miracle*, 100.

⁵² Kang Sin-ch'ŏl, et al., *80-nyŏndae haksæng undongsa*, 24-25.

⁵³ Mun Yong-sik, et al., *80-nyŏndae minjok minju undong: 10 dae chojik sakkŏn* (The 1980s national democratic movements: ten major incidents with organizations) (Seoul: Ach'im, 1989), 15.

and coordinated leadership groups to discuss new strategies to further popularize their ideas. In early 1984, when the Chun government implemented a policy of appeasement, numerous students were released from prison, and returned to campus with reinforced determination. As Ogle points out, “[s]ending dissidents to prison is, of course, in the long run self-defeating. They come out more determined, better trained than when they went in.”⁵⁴ Indeed, these returning students immediately set up committees that called for the democratization of campus and society at large.⁵⁵

However, students knew they had to reach people beyond the campus, both in Korea and abroad. Clearly campus democratization was inseparable from democratization of the entire society. During the 1980s, Korea drew international attention when Pope John Paul II visited in May 1983, followed by U.S. President Reagan a few months later. In 1986, Korea hosted the Asian Games, perhaps as a rehearsal for the Seoul Olympic Games in 1988. Students took full advantage of these international events to stage protests, and to publicize their grievances to the domestic and international publics. In the run-up to the 1988 Olympics, tear-gas and molotov cocktails on the streets of Seoul caught the attention of the international media, which brought pressure on the Korean government to resolve domestic disorders ahead of the Seoul Olympics. Students were particularly critical of the holding of the '88 Olympics in Seoul. Students at Kangwŏn and Korea Universities in 1982 and at the National Student Democratic Federation in 1985 argued that, although the Seoul Olympics promoted nationalistic fervor and a false sense of national superiority, the Olympic effort further degraded the national economy by increasing its dependence, and threatened the livelihood of the *minjung*.⁵⁶ Even though Koreans suffered under the Chun regime, many were unable to understand the reasons for their oppression. During the 1970s, church and student groups had attempted to address this ignorance by providing night schooling (the *hagwŏn* movement), primarily to workers. But the incorporation of political thought and liberation theology into their basic curriculum of reading, writing, and arithmetic got the movement closed down by the Park government.⁵⁷ From 1980 onwards, the students reinstated the night class system (now called *yahak*) with a far more militant style which concentrated on analyzing capitalism, imperialism and democracy in order to inform the masses of the conditions and reasons for their oppression. In other words, these classes tried to foster a modern *minjung* consciousness. Government repression of such schools recommenced and in a late 1983 statement, five church-sponsored *yahak* groups deplored the suppression and harassment their night schools suffered at the hands of the police. They warned that incidents, such as the arrest of *yahak* instructor Hwang Chu-sŏk

⁵⁴ George E. Ogle, *South Korea: Dissent Within the Economic Miracle*, 99.

⁵⁵ Mun Yong-sik, et al., *80-nyŏndae minjok minju undong*, 18.

⁵⁶ Kangwŏn taehakkyo pan'asyo panmi t'ujaeng hagu iltong (Kangwon National University anti-fascist, anti-American struggle student brotherhood), “Kangwŏn taehakkyo minjuhwa t'ujaeng sŏnŏn” (Declaration of democratization struggle by Kangwŏn National University), April 22, 1982, 311; Kodaie pan'asyo minju hagu iltong (Korea [Koryŏ] University Antifascist Democratic Student Union), “Pan'asyo minju hagu siguk sŏnŏn” (Declaration on the State of Affairs by the Anti Fascist Democratic Students), May 14, 1982, 314; “Chŏnhangnyŏn p'asyo hŏnbŏp ch'ŏlp'ye t'ujaeng wiwŏnhoe mit sammin undong t'anap chŏji t'ujaeng wiwŏnhoe sŏngmyŏngsŏ – urinŭn we nongsŏngŭl hanŭnga?” (Declaration of the Chŏnhangnyŏn struggle committee for the abolition of the fascist constitution and the struggle committee to prevent the repression of the Sammin movement – why we are protesting), December 18, 1985, 363. All the above declarations can be found in *80-nyŏndae han'guk sahoewa haksae undong*.

⁵⁷ George E. Ogle, *South Korea: Dissent within the Economic Miracle*, 107-108.

because of a lecture on human rights he delivered at Myōng-dong Cathedral, generated a great deal of anger among the workers and the clergy. Such events were driving the workers towards Communism.⁵⁸ The unintended consequences of such arrests may have been the strengthening of the student movements despite government repression. Each additional incident was widely publicized, and helped intensify the contest for legitimacy between the students and the Chun government.

The students gained further sympathy, publicity, and support from the public when their mothers got involved. The foundation of *Minkahyup* [*mingahyōp*]: *Minjuhwa silch'ōn kajok undong hyōpūihoe* (the Conference of the Family Movement for Democratization) on December 28, 1985, was a direct consequence of the students' political struggle, and provided a remarkable lift for their cause. It was prompted by the repression of the Youth Alliance for Democratization (Abbr. *Minch'ōngnyōn*: *Minjuhwa undong ch'ōngnyōn yōnhap*), a prominent dissidence group since 1983, and the torture of its founder, Kim Keun-tae [Kim Kūn-t'ae].⁵⁹ The intrinsic strength of *Minkahyup* was that its membership was primarily made up of middle-aged mothers and housewives who had no ideological agenda, but were concerned for the welfare of their imprisoned or persecuted relatives. It exists to this day and has been demanding the abolition of the infamous National Security Law, which has been used by all the successive Korean governments since Syngman Rhee, including that of former dissident leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Kim Dae-jung, to clamp down on dissidence. The creation of *Minkahyup* further undermined the government's claim that it was fighting North Korean agents and Communism. *Minkahyup* held peaceful rallies every Thursday outside Pagoda Park in downtown Seoul to protest against human rights violations under the Chun rule, but the police were reluctant to round up the protesters. Such popularization of the democracy movement by expanding its membership from elite students to the masses – the *minjung* – was an important objective of the *murim* and an essential key to the eventual success of the democracy movement. These efforts paid off in June 1987, when millions of protesters from all walks of life spilled into the streets of Korean cities, and finally obtained democratic elections. While the candidate of the ruling party won these presidential elections, both opposition leaders, Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung, became, in turn, Presidents during the following years, and consolidated the foundation of the Korean democracy.

Conclusion

By the mid-1980s, the student movements were clearly winning their contest of legitimacy with the Chun government. They realized that the Park dictatorship's propaganda machine had appropriated the concept of *minjok* to legitimize its authoritarian government. Park had managed to develop a successful *minjok* discourse linking the nationalistic purity of the legendary *hwarang* military leaders of ancient Korea with the needs of contemporary national security, meanwhile limiting democracy.

⁵⁸ Ch'ōnggye chiyōk yahak kyosa iltong (Ch'ōnggye district night school instructor brotherhood), "Uri ūi ipchang" (Our position), December 12, 1987, in *80-nyōndae han'guk sahoewa haksae undong*, 332.

⁵⁹ Thereafter, Kim remained a prominent opposition leader, and was tortured and jailed several times through the mid-1990s.

Therefore, instead of trying to recapture the discourse of *minjok*, student leaders fashioned a new type of nationalist movement, *minjung*, which would unite the various struggles of the students, workers, farmers, slum dwellers, journalists, etc. The students were successful in shifting the discourse from *minjok* towards the interests of “those who were politically oppressed, socially alienated, and economically excluded from the benefits of economic growth,” i.e. the *minjung*.⁶⁰

Despite their disagreements on some of the goals and strategies for the *minjung* and student movements, the *murim* and *hangnim* students complemented one another within the framework of the overarching *minjung* movement. While the action-oriented *hangnim* group provided hardcore vanguard units for political struggle, the *murim* students prepared the ground for the organization and the “popularization” of the *minjung* movement. Their combined approaches both recognized the necessity of expanding the base of the movement, and steadily undermined the legitimacy of the Chun government. They argued that the Chun administration was a fascist, anti-*minjok* and anti-*minjung* regime, and importantly, they strove to expose and articulate the political and economic responsibility of the United States for the socio-economic afflictions of Koreans.

⁶⁰ Kim Sunhyuk, *The Politics of Democratization in Korea: The Role of Civil Society* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 143.