

President Park and His Learned Friends

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In 1969, eight years after his armed usurpation, President Park Chung Hee of South Korea had his country's constitution amended so that he could seek a third term. Three years ago, in October, 1972, as he was serving his last term under the new rules, Park declared martial law, dissolved the National Assembly, and suspended the constitution. He did all this, as we were told then, in order to cope better with the "stark realities of a rapidly changing international situation." Park was referring to East-West détente, which he viewed as a deadly threat to one of the twin pillars of his legitimacy: anticommunism and economic modernization.

While the country was under martial law a new constitution was adopted in the "referendum" held in November, one which would permit Park to seek reelection without limit and under which he would have the power to appoint one-third of the national legislature and to dissolve the whole body if so desired. The constitution was hailed by Park's supporters as an embodiment of the principle of "separation of powers" with built-in "checks and balances," and they christened it, although somewhat apologetically, the "Korean Style of Democracy." In December of that year Park was reelected President by the newly created electoral college, with all but two of the 2,359 members voting for him. Those two votes were declared invalid. He had been the only candidate.

Since that time President Park has been running the country with a remarkably steady hand, issuing numerous "emergency decrees" and railroading other repressive measures through his handpicked legislature. In addition, on February 12, 1975, he ordered and won another "referendum" that was supposed to reaffirm the nation's endorsement of the "Korean Style of Democracy."

It is impossible briefly to document the suffering that has been sustained by the people of South Korea in the wake of these extraordinary moves by Park.

But the mechanism of terror and repression has included kidnappings, secret trials, jailings, tortures, mysterious disappearances, fatal "accidents," "suicides" in interrogation centers, predawn executions, confiscation and cremation of victims' corpses. Much of this has received coverage in the leading American newspapers, and in reports of Amnesty International.* But one facet of Park's statecraft has consistently escaped the view of the American reading public: his courtship of the intellectual community.

When a nation undergoes a political crisis of this dimension, its people look to their intellectual commu-

*See Amnesty International's report on its mission to South Korea between March 27 and April 9, 1975, especially the section on "harassment and terror."

There is only one American journalist, as far as I know, who has come to the defense of the Korean regime. In December, 1974, the syndicated columnist Jack Anderson released a series of three articles on South Korea while he was visiting Seoul on his "Christmas mission to seek the release" of the Christian leaders in jail. In the first article he defended the jailing of the Christian leaders by pointing out that they had been guilty of violating Park's emergency decrees. In the second article he argued that Park was not responsible for the 1973 kidnapping of his political opponent in Tokyo. Anderson wrote: "But he [Park] told me earnestly: 'I swear to God that I had nothing to do with this ugly affair.'" In his third article this "investigative journalist" declared: "I found that Park's opponents are quite free to denounce him and to demonstrate against him" (*Washington Post*, December 5, 6, 7, 1974).

Jack Anderson's friendship with the Seoul regime goes back to the early 1960's when he became acquainted with Hong Sung Chul and Kim Un Yong, both agents of the Korean CIA attached to the Embassy in Washington. Hong later became Minister of Home Affairs and Kim Assistant Director of the Presidential Protective Force. It was through these men that Anderson made his associations with Park Chong Kyu, then director of the powerful PPF; one suspects it was this Park who made the arrangements for Anderson's trip to Korea in December, 1974, even though there is no reason to doubt that he made the trip also "at the urging of [the Korean] Christian leaders," as he told us in his first article.

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nity for a fresh outlook, a critical perspective, if not an outright political alternative. This is particularly true of those nations, such as South Korea, which enjoy a relatively high rate of literacy. Yet, with a few notable exceptions, the Korean intellectual community has failed to speak out.*

The effect of this failure has been acutely felt because in Korea, a nation imbued with a Confucian bias, men of learning have always held a special claim to the society's trust and deference, as spokesmen for what is deemed fair and proper. The government in Seoul recognizes this. Indeed, it is determined to help preserve that élitist image of the intellectuals so long as the intellectuals can be made to promote ideals of fairness and justice as the government sees them.

Some intellectuals are simply apathetic. Others prefer to remain silent because, understandably, they are fearful of political reprisals if they publicly dissent. But there are also those who believe that they can best serve their country as scholars and that they can best preserve their professional integrity through political neutrality. These men argue that there is something inherently "unscholarly" and "unprofessional" about taking a political stance on controversial issues, even if that means nothing more than voicing a sense of outrage and indignation at the sight of injustice and brutality. They fail to recognize or refuse to acknowledge that what they pursue as a life of disinterested inquiry is being exploited by the regime to its own political advantage. While the police round up dissidents, such intellectuals stand by with all the dignity and poise befitting a proud profession, meditating upon the blessings of modernization or the "benefits of corruption in a developing nation."

Indeed, there is reason to believe that university students have repeatedly failed in recent years to initiate the kind of drastic change they once did in the 1960's because their own teachers have betrayed their historical trust as the consequence of the nation.

The Syngman Rhee regime was tame in comparison to Park's. There are things intellectuals cannot do today that they might have attempted during the Rhee years without risking ugly consequences for themselves and their families. Still, ruthless as Park's regime is, fear plays but a small part in the making of today's moral paralysis of the intellectual community. The politics of withdrawal explains the Korean intellectuals' failure to respond effectively to the crisis of the times, but not their complicity in generating that crisis.

Some intellectuals fail to live up to the expectations of their community without being indifferent, reticent, or aloof. They are, in fact, very much involved. Actually, the word "fail" does not quite apply to these men, because there is something furtive about their behavior. They wear the mantle of a scholar or that of a professor, but freely engage in activities that are subversive to the ideals they profess, such as disinterest. I refer to those who belong, overtly or covertly, full-time or part-time to that circle of élitist courtesans in the service of the regime whose responsibility it is to justify every act of madness that has been commit-

ted by their leaders, explaining it away as some sort of a blessing in disguise or as an historical inevitability. Most of them are recipients of advanced degrees from prestigious universities in the United States and have been trained in one of the social sciences.

One of their achievements is mastery of the art of flexibility. Until their public roles are clearly defined for them by their superiors, they prefer to lead lives of studied ambivalence. When they are in the company of old friends all too familiar with their foibles, they demonstrate their power of discernment by making disparaging statements about the regime they serve, at times even making a lively forecast of its impending

*Without doubt, the most remarkable of these exceptions is Poet Kim Chi Ha, who has been in and out of jail ever since the publication of his "Five Bandits" in 1970. On February 15, 1975, three days after the new referendum, Kim was released from prison along with Professor Kim Don Gil of Yonsei University. The Rev. Pak Hyong Kyu (Protestant), head of the outlawed Urban Industrial Mission, and, the following day, the Most Rev. Daniel Chi Hak Soun (Roman Catholic). Not included in this Presidential clemency were the twenty-two persons convicted as members of the so-called People's Revolutionary Party, which many believe to be nonexistent. Shortly after Kim's release the nation's leading newspaper, *Dong-A-Ilbo*, carried three installments of his descriptions of prison life, in which he charged that the alleged PRP members had been tortured into making false confessions. This led to Kim's rearrest on March 14.

The alleged members of PRP had been tried by secret court-martial, and the convictions of eight of them were upheld on April 8. None of the defendants was present when the Supreme Court delivered its final judgment; also absent were the defendants' lawyers, who were believed to have been under house arrest at that time. The hangings began at 4:50 the next morning inside the Seoul penitentiary while 150 policemen stood guard outside. The following day, April 10, the police blocked the funeral service for one of the eight, seized the body and had it cremated without the family's consent, presumably to prevent a possible public demonstration that might have been triggered by the funeral procession. On April 11 a twenty-three-year-old college student disemboweled himself to express his despair and indignation, and died the next day.

Back to Kim Chi Ha. He is now awaiting a new trial. The charge is that he is a self-confessed "Communist." Kim recently had a long "declaration of conscience" smuggled out of his cell in anticipation of the trial. (The full text was published in the Tokyo-based Korean newspaper *Minjok Shinbo* in its issue of August 21, 1975.) In it Kim states that he is not and has never been a Communist and that some of the incriminating "confessions" he had signed were results of torture.

The poet has been suffering from tuberculosis for many years and is now believed to be very frail. Even if his health holds out and even if he does not receive the death sentence, there is no assurance that he will not some day be pronounced a victim of "suicide." See Jerome Alan Cohen's "A Grim Anniversary in South Korea" in the October 9, 1974, issue of the *Washington Post*, recounting the jail murder of Professor Tsche Chong Gil in October, 1973. See also reports of the pre-October, 1972, kidnapping and prison atrocities in the Hong Kong-based magazine *Ronin's* special issue (August, 1972) on "Anti-Communism and Spies in South Korea."

doom—taking care to add that their remarks are “off the record.” When they feel defenseless about their lifestyle, they make frantic attempts to befuddle their onlookers by alternating the tone of their speech, with the virtuosity of a juggler, between seriousness and jest, so they can always say afterward, if need be, that they were merely “joking.”

Among these men of redoubtable agility the cleverest and the most persevering reach the top of the ladder. In recognition of their enviable Western training and of their proven ability to grasp the “stark realities” of this cheerless world, they are rewarded with glamorous posts. Some are appointed to the National Assembly* among whom the luckier ones become chairmen of its committees. Some are appointed Special Assistants to the President, others become ambassadors. Whatever their official functions, those believed to possess creative talents are entrusted with the task of fashioning the regime’s official doctrines, even though their penchant for tautologies and non sequiturs prevents them from ever going beyond the coining of a phrase. The waiting line is long and the climb often treacherous. But many young men with kindred appetites and tastes feel it is worth a try. So they line up.

It goes without saying that there are not enough attractive positions to go around for all those who are interested. But the leaders, who are infinitely more astute in the art of manipulation than their predecessors in the Rhee era, know better than to disappoint those whom they cannot accommodate. They appoint them to such intellectual advisory bodies as the National Unification Board (a cabinet ministry), the Council of Professorial Evaluators (attached to the Office of the Prime Minister), the Korean Institute of Science and Technology (mainly for engineers), and the Korean Development Institute (mainly for economists). Some are sent abroad as consultants attached to some foreign mission. The government also invites large numbers of intellectuals to official parties and receptions, where they are given an opportunity to meet powerful people and their learned friends.

But by far the most effective method of bringing the intellectuals into line appears to be scholarly conferences. There are so many in Korea every year that it is well-nigh impossible to keep track of all of them. Most of these conferences are sponsored by various “research institutes” affiliated with universities. Some of these institutes are privately operated by business and political leaders (including one former cabinet member) who like to be thought of and remembered as patrons of scholarship.

According to the estimate of the newspaper *Dong-A-Ilbo*, approximately fifty such conferences were held in the first half of 1974 alone. *Dong-A-Ilbo* editorialized that “the sponsoring individuals seem more interested in exhibition than in substance.” What the editorial failed to point out is that in many of these instances it is the Korean Government that supplies the funds that make these activities possible, though they are often funneled through labyrinthine channels.

The government’s enthusiasm for scholarly activity is by no means confined to the home front. Outside Korea its campaign to build an army of friendly intellectuals, a kind of pacification program for willing clients, is most evident in the United States, which has the largest concentration abroad of Korean intellectuals. There the Korean Government has set up, through the initiative of its trusted intellectuals, “centers” and “institutes” that promote various scholarly and quasi-scholarly activities among Korea specialists. Some of these outfits even put out learned journals. Government funds are also used every year to finance conferences and symposia, all having to do with Korean studies.

In most cases, according to reliable sources, these funds originate in the Korean Central Intelligence Agency and are made available in cash through various front organizations to certain Korean scholars in the United States, mostly Korea specialists. These scholars in turn organize the above-mentioned gatherings, sometimes under the auspices of the government-financed centers or institutes and, occasionally, in conjunction with larger academic events of American origin.

According to the recent congressional testimony of Professor Jai Hyon Lee of Western Illinois University—who, at considerable risk, resigned in June, 1973, as Director of the Korean Information Office and chief cultural and information attaché with the Korean Embassy in Washington—the Korean Embassy in collaboration with the Korean CIA has been conducting a series of “clandestine operations” in this country aimed at muting the criticism of the Korean regime. These operations, according to Lee’s testimony, consists of three techniques, “seduction, pay-off, and intimidation.” In the past two years the Korean Government has been forced to reduce these activities sharply, owing in no small part to Professor Lee’s much publicized act of courage. But his testimony further reveals that many Korean intellectuals do not wait till they are seduced or intimidated. In explaining how scholarly conferences are organized to “rationalize Park’s dictatorship or at least to curb their [the scholars’] criticism,” Lee said before the House International Relations Committee’s Subcommittee on International Organizations:

For example, such was a seminar held at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, shortly after Park’s October, 1972, martial law. The embassy’s educational attaché who masterminded and paid off for this operation later boasted that, as a result, the organizer of the meeting wrote a letter to the *New York Times* in support of Park’s police-state measures.**

*Of the seventy-three whom President Park appointed to the National Assembly (total membership 219), twelve were university professors, ranking, as a group, second only to professional politicians totaling twenty-six.

**Dr. Jai Hyon Lee’s testimony of June 12, 1975. See *Congressional Record*, June 12, 1975, E3110-3113.

Some of these conferences are of international scope, whether they are held in Korea or in the United States. The Lee testimony mentions one such example: the symposium in Washington, D.C., in April, 1973, on "Korea and the Powers in the 1970s," jointly sponsored by the Washington-based "Institute for Asian Studies" and by Kyung Nam University of Masan, Korea. "Paying the participants all the travel expenses and allowances," Professor Lee recalled, "the Seoul government financed this operation through a pro-Park Korean newspaper publisher in Washington, D.C."

Within a year the youthful president of Kyung Nam University, who is the brother of President Park's then chief bodyguard, organized another conference, this time in Seoul, in collaboration with his Korean friend on the faculty of the City University of New York. The conference took place on January 21-24, 1974, and the visiting participants consisted of four scholars from Japan (one Korean) and fourteen from the United States (three Koreans), of whom eight were members of the CUNY faculty. It was billed as an "International Symposium on Peace and Security in East Asia."

This conference was severely criticized by the foes of the Park regime as an instance of intellectual sell-out, particularly because, coincidentally, the conference was shortly preceded by three successive "emergency decrees" with which President Park intensified his repression of the dissidents at home. But some scholars also denounced it heartily on grounds of mediocrity, pointing out that none of the eleven American scholars had anything directly to do with Korean studies and that they had been picked merely by virtue of their being either a former professor, present colleague, or an associate of one of the organizers. Happily, there was another conference that was thought more prestigious and was able to accommodate some of those who had been left out.

On June 25-28 of the same year a Seoul-based organization with the title of "The Korean Institute of International Studies" put together its "Seventh International Conference" on the welcome theme "Search for Peace: Alternatives to Confrontation in East Asia." The proceedings were subsequently published in three installments in the Institute's *The Korean Journal of International Studies*. This journal boasts an "international advisory board" that includes familiar, even famous, scholars from the U.S. and Europe. Among other items this learned journal publishes "New Year Press Conference by President Park Chung Hee" running into twenty-six pages in small print.

In addition to the thirty-four participants from within Korea and seven members of the National Assembly sitting as "observers," the "Search for Peace" was attended by fifteen scholars from nine foreign countries, including six from the United States (two Koreans). The conference was also adorned by the presence of the ambassadors of the United States, Japan, the Philippines, Australia, and Canada. After all that trouble, however, this convention of international talents was unable to impress everyone. Just two weeks

after its conclusion, *Dong-A-Ilbo* offered the following editorial observations on the comings and goings of foreign scholars in its issue of July 12, 1974:

At those conferences that are of international nature, the foreign participants show both geographical diversity and distinguished past achievements. But the contents of their papers are either obsolete, i.e., stuff which they may have used in some journals many years ago, or collections of platitudes. One wonders if this is attributable to their hectic schedules.

But the editorial was not content to leave the matter at that.

We wish to stress our view that our precious foreign exchange and research funds would be more usefully spent in the assistance of our own scholars at home than in the promotion of the publicity of those research agencies that sponsor these conferences or in the procurement of stale stories which their participating scholars deliver.

Obviously, the Korean Government did not share this sentiment, because it does not always seek after foreign scholars for scholarly reasons. In a country where there is a certain mystique that goes with any mention of "Westerner" or "American" the presence of these Western scholars adds prestige not only to the conferences, at which they are carefully chosen guests, but also to the hosting government. The leaders see to it that the appearances of these scholars receive maximum publicity by encouraging newspapers to run interviews, summaries of their papers, or stories about their lives.

The visiting scholars like these trips, for they get highly satisfying treatment as honored guests in a country where the people, as institutions and as private individuals, have acquired a reputation for pampering their foreign visitors. Curiously, many of these scholars seem just as anxious to assure their colleagues back home that they are superior to their Korean hosts. Thus, when their visiting is over, they make elaborate efforts to convince their colleagues how uncomfortable they have felt while in Korea, characterizing their hosts as mindlessly extravagant.

The proliferation of conferences on Korean studies recently took an ambitious turn, not without a touch of comedy, when a group calling itself "The International Association of the Organizations for Korean Studies" came forward with the suggestion that from now on it represented all major centers of Korean studies throughout the world. Under the leadership of one Tokyo-based Korean scholar serving as "Secretary General," this international congress now speaks for "regional divisions," covering Europe, America, Asia, and the Pacific, each with an "elected representative." It seems more likely, however, that these representatives were appointed by some hidden power rather than elected by their constituencies, for those Korea specialists in this country to whom I have spoken about this could not recall ever participating in the

selection of the gentleman who is listed as the representative of the "American Division."

The International Association held its "second general assembly" on July 1-8 in Seoul last year and has since reported the attendance of a hundred specialists from ten different nations. The prospectus for this undertaking included a special message from the Secretary General that the visiting scholars were being "kindly advised to abstain from any sensitive statements or acts which may be taken as 'political.'"

Seoul was the site of another major academic event earlier in the summer of 1975. There was a joint conference June 9-12 of the Seoul-based Korean Political Science Association and the Association of Korean Political Scientists in North America, which has a membership of 139. This meeting calls for special mention, partly because it was an all-Korean affair and partly because it did not address itself to Korean studies as such. Furthermore, it is expected to be repeated every year. The air fare was paid by each visiting scholar, but, to the relief of most, the precise nature of the management of the remaining expenses was kept in the dark—a challenge to the scholars' imaginations but no burden on their consciences. Immediately after their arrival at the airport on June 8 the forty-one scholars were herded into waiting buses and whisked off for an unannounced visit to the national cemetery to pay their respects to the late wife of President Park. Following a few days of conferences, which were punctuated by a series of receptions with some of Korea's leading industrialists and political notables, the scholars were taken on a tour of the front line, where an army band cheered them with martial airs. Subsequently, their tour of the country included the CIA headquarters and the marvels of Korea's economic progress in various provinces, where the governors and their lieutenants came out to greet them with offerings. As if to reassure these scholars of their privileged status in society, their police-escorted buses even drove through red lights.

The climax of the trip was a visit to the Blue House on June 20. The forty-one visiting scholars, together with a few representatives of the Korean political science group, were invited to meet the President. Shortly before the President made his appearance at the reception the guests were politely but firmly exhorted to greet him with applause. They obliged, and handshakes followed. There were spontaneous exchanges of compliments between host and guests, and the atmosphere was jovial throughout. Even the surprise excursion to the cemetery seemed forgotten and forgiven.

To many of the scholars it seemed incomprehensible that this small man with such a modest bearing could have inflicted so much pain and anguish upon his countrymen. Only one out of the forty-one visiting scholars seized the occasion to voice a note of dissent: He told Park that there was a "wall of alienation" that seemed to separate the President from his people. All indications are that the chief took this with magnanimity. Scenes of the reception were shown on the evening news.

Almost without exception these conferences, both at home and abroad, are attended by the government's official intellectuals and, frequently, by the agents of the Korean CIA as well. The presence of KCIA agents is a stern reminder to the participating scholars that they are expected to behave in an uncontroversial manner; but the presence of official intellectuals, often those on the way up the ladder, is a challenge and inspiration to the aspiring. Identification of these intellectuals is never a problem. They make their presence felt by assuming a certain manner betraying the casualness and familiarity one associates with people in charge of a situation.

In short, the regime in Seoul is not content merely to enlist the services of some intellectuals who promote its cause by providing perpetually needed explanations and justifications. It reaches out for an even larger number and brings them into the proximity of power in the hope of securing their support and acquiescence. The oppressive aura of visible power can cause a slowing down of one's critical faculties. This, one suspects, is among the reasons why the leaders in Seoul like periodically to march their unsuspecting guests through the corridors of power, lined with visible reminders everywhere that life can be good to those intellectuals who will but renounce their professional pretensions and acknowledge that intellectuals are not critics but caudal appendages to men in power.

One of the most frequently heard arguments in defense of the flirtation of intellectuals with power is that it is essential to the taming of power that its holders be kept in close touch with the voices of the intellectual community and that, if it were not for some intellectuals' mediative efforts, chances for communication between the house of power and the house of intellect would be hopelessly reduced. The problem in Korea, however, is not so much that there is not enough dialogue between the two contending houses, but rather that through the political cooption of the intellectual community dialogue has all but ceased to be a real issue. There is no creative tension between mind and power in Korea; one speaks for the other. This is no small feat in statecraft.