

International Research on the Jeju 4.3 Events and Suggestions for Internationalization

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I examine research on the Jeju 4.3 events, published in English outside South Korea since the 1940s in the field of social science (e.g. politics, international relations, and sociology), law, and history. I then address how to internationalize the Jeju 4.3 events by asking three questions: first, *which aspects* of the Jeju 4.3 events should be internationalized? Second, *why* do we have to internationalize the Jeju 4.3 events? Third, should the *localization* of the Jeju 4.3 event come before the internationalization? I conclude the paper with three practical way to the internationalization of the Jeju 4.3 events: first, to translate and distribute materials that are already available domestically; second, to secure enough manpower to internationalize the Jeju 4.3 events and provide continuously supports; and finally, to facilitate the networks and communicate with international governmental and nongovernmental organizations and to affiliate with other domestic and international institutions.

Introduction

The world celebrates every 10th of December as Human Rights Day commemorating the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR and the Jeju 4.3 events are twins. The 4.3 events took place while the world was preparing, debating, and negotiating the universal standards of human rights after the monumental shock by the Nazi Holocaust. By the time the UN General Assembly was declaring the UDHR, the nascent South Korean government, backed by the US military advisors, set up the headquarters in Jeju and pressed for harsh suppression. Residents in mountain villages were for-

cibly relocated to the coast villages abandoning their houses, livestock, and farms. Mass killings, disappearances, sweeping arrests, illegal detentions, and tortures were concentrated between October 1948 and February 1949. The UDHR and the civilian massacres in Jeju clearly show the wide gap between the Ideal and Reality. For over sixty years, victims and activists in Jeju struggled hard to narrow this huge gap between the Ideal and Reality. This paper is also an effort to narrow this gap by considering the possibility of globalizing the Jeju 4.3 events and the subsequent social movement to find the truth and achieve transitional justice.

The Jeju 4.3 events were a series of armed uprisings and counterinsurgency actions that occur-

ed between 1947 and 1954 in Jeju Province, which is the largest island in the southernmost part of South Korea. The counterinsurgency strategy was extremely brutal, involving mass arrests and detentions, forced relocations, torture, indiscriminate killings, and many large-scale massacres of civilians. The conflict resulted in an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 deaths, which corresponded to 10 percent of the total population of Jeju in 1947. In 2000, the government established the National Committee for Investigating the Truth about the Jeju 4.3 Events and Recovering the Honor of the Victims (Jeju Commission). The commission is still in progress at the time of writing, but is scheduled to end in the near future. To date, the commission has identified 15,093 victims, of whom 10,729 (71%) were killed, 3,920 (26%) were missing, and 444 (3%) were injured or imprisoned. Of the individual cases, 78% were attributed to state agents such as the police, military and paramilitary groups, and 12% to communist guerrillas. Most victims were males in their teens and twenties (57%), but 35% were either female or aged under 10 or over 60, a fact that indicates the indiscriminate nature of the killings. In addition, the commission identified 32,397 family members affected by the events.

International Research on the Jeju 4.3 Events

Before advancing further, I have to define two terms – ‘international’ and ‘research.’ First, I examined research on the Jeju 4.3 events, published in English outside South Korea. I am aware of the fact that there are important researches in other languages beyond English and also I am aware of the fact that the Jeju

Commission investigated researches in Japan, China, and Russia. However, this is beyond the scope of this paper. Second, I examine researches on the Jeju 4.3 events in the field of social science (e.g. politics, international relations, and sociology), law, and history. There are other studies in the field of arts and literatures but these are again beyond the scope of my research.

Research on the Jeju 4.3 events before year 2000

There are three phases of international research on the Jeju 4.3 events. Most of us are familiar with the last phase – the one in the late 1980s and early 1990s – when the Jeju 4.3 events were investigated by scholars studying the Cold War history. However, not many people are aware of two earlier phases. First, there have been studies on the US military government and Korean politics and society between 1945 and 1948. Although these studies do not focus exclusively on the Jeju 4.3 events but they are good sources for understanding the backgrounds of the events (Green 1950; McCune 1950; Meade 1951).

Second, there has been another wave of international studies on the Jeju 4.3 event in the 1960s and 1970s. These studies approach the Jeju 4.3 events as a part of communist movements or peasant movements. As with the previous phase, the events themselves are not the main topic of research. There have been two important studies (Scalapino and Lee 1972; Paige 1964). Both works are important studies, published with prestigious university presses, and received good reviews from peers.

Scalapino and Lee’s (1972) perspective on the Jeju 4.3 events is close to the view of the official South Korean government in the 1970s.

Although Scalapino and Lee (1972) use the documents and materials from both parties (e.g. communist guerrillas and the government), they basically views the Jeju 4.3 events as communist rebellion. The Jeju 4.3 events are understood as a confrontation between ideologies and the misrule of the US military government or civilian massacres are missing in their argument.

In contrast, Paige's (1964) understanding of the Jeju 4.3 events is somewhat different. Paige (1964) argues that Jeju 4.3 events should be understood as 'major internal war events', not as a simple ideological conflict. He further reveals that the government suppression was 'repressive and extremely cruel.' In addition, he tries to give a balanced account of the event by confirming the US report on the cause of the Jeju 4.3 events: "The disorders broke out partly at the inspiration of the Communists opposing the South Korean election, and partly because of the islanders' long-smoldering resentment against despotic police and corrupt officials."

Full-fledged studies on the Jeju 4.3 events began in the 1980s when the documents and materials from the US military, US military government in South Korea, and US State Department became available. At the same time, in the field of Cold War history, a revisionist view emphasizing the US responsibility of the Cold War challenged the an orthodox or traditional view focusing on the Soviet responsibility. It was John Merrill who started to study the 4.3 events in his MA thesis at the Harvard University in 1975 (Merrill 1975). Merrill further studied the 4.3 events in his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Delaware in 1982 (Merrill 1982). Many have already criticized Merrill's work and pointed out the serious limitations of his research. In short, Merrill's work is a great contribution to the studies of the Jeju 4.3 events

since it was the first study not only in the US but also in the South Korea. However, Merrill could not see the limitations of the US documents and did not consider why and with what intentions the US military and military government recorded such reports in the first place. Thus, Merrill's study could not properly see the role of the US or the US military government in South Korea at that time. Merrill's works have also been published in various articles (Merrill 1980; 1983; 1989)

Bruce Cumings (1981) is well-known for his revisionist view on the origins of the Cold War in the Korean peninsula. In his book, Cumings criticizes traditional understanding by focusing on the socioeconomic and political situation in Korea between 1945 and 1948. Cumings argues that US occupational forces and military government could not fully understand the complexity of the Korean society and thus made critical policy mistakes that caused the Jeju 4.3 events. Cumings argues that fundamental cause of the internal armed conflicts such as Jeju 4.3 events in South Korea is deep-rooted social and economic inequality between elites and masses, which was further exacerbated by the misrule of the US military government. Thus, in his presentation at Tokyo in 1998, Cumings expressed his view on the US responsibility:

If it should come to pass that any Koreans succeed in gaining compensation from the American Government for the events of 1945 to 1953, certainly the people of Cheju should come first. For it was on that hauntingly beautiful island that the postwar world witnessed the American capacity for unrestrained violence against indigenous people fighting for self-determination and social justice.

Research on the Jeju 4.3 events after year 2000

Unfortunately, studies on the Jeju 4.3 events since 2000 are rare and especially studies conducted by foreign scholars outside South Korea is almost none. For example, Pricilla B. Hayner in her *Unspeakable Truth: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commission* (2001), which is known as the textbook of truth commissions, did not even mention the Jeju 4.3 events or any other South Korean cases. In her second edition, *Unspeakable Truth: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions* (2011), Hayner includes two South Korean cases – the Presidential Truth Commission on Suspicious Deaths (Suspicious Deaths Commission) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Republic of Korea (TRCK) – but simply mentions Hunjoon Kim's (2009) article in *International Journal of Transitional Justice* to introduce the Jeju Commission. Another important work on truth commission is Eric Wiebelhaus-Brahm's (2010) *Truth Commission and Transitional Societies: The Impact on Human Rights and Democracy* but in this book he did not consider the Jeju 4.3 events or the Jeju Commission.

Thus, studies on the Jeju 4.3 events are mostly conducted by Korean scholars who study or work in other countries including the United States, Canada, and Australia. So far, there are four doctoral dissertations on the Jeju 4.3 events (Son 2008; Kim 2008; Chang 2009; Kang 2010). Other works includes articles and book chapters. In most cases, doctoral dissertations could be published in part in article or book chapter formats (Kim 2000; Baik 2007; Kim 2009; Millett 2005; Kang et al. 2010; Kim, forthcoming). In addition, a few Korean scholars studying the civilian massacres during the Korean

War have published their research in foreign journals. It is worth examining since there is a close parallels between two massacre cases (Cho 2007; Kim 2010; Suh 2010).

Research on the Jeju 4.3 events can be divided into two groups depending on the topic and perspective. The first group of scholars sees the events as a communist uprising or rebellion and focuses on counterinsurgency operations. Examples are the studies of Kyengho Son (2008) and Allan Millett (2005), which falls into academic discipline of military history. There have also been studies in South Korea from the same military history perspective (Jung 2000). These scholars share anticommunist perspective which basically sees the Jeju 4.3 events as a communist rebellion and views military operations as the just use of military force. In addition, studies like Son (2008) and Millett (2005) relies heavily on documents and materials from the US military or interviews with retired military personnel who worked for the US military and military government in South Korea. Thus, these studies are not entirely free from criticisms which Merrill and Cumings received.

In addition, Millett (2005) makes an unconventional and rather radical argument about the Jeju 4.3 events. He claims that the Korean War should be dated from April 3, 1948, with the Jeju 4.3 events. Suh Dae-Sook (2008), a well-known scholar of North Korea and Kim Il Sung, however, criticizes Millett's view by stating:

The problem with his choice of 3 April 1948 is not so much that it is a bad judgment and confuses the period or duration of the war but that it fails to distinguish the South Korean security problems from North Korean war preparation. Also his choice of a starting point implies that the North Korean Communists had direct control or influence over

most of the South Korean anti-government insurgencies and uprising. In reality, Kil Il Sung and his followers had relatively little control over the South Korean Communists and the Workers' Party of South Korea (WPSK). Contrary to what Millett claims, Kim Il Sung was not even the chairman or general secretary (p.51) of the Workers' Party of North Korea (WPNK) (Suh 2008).

Thus, Kyengho Son (2008), Millett's student, distinguished himself from Millett's view in two ways. First, Son examines the Jeju 4.3 events independent of the Korean War. Second, Son not only uses the US documents and materials but also uses Korean materials. Nevertheless, Son still supports his key arguments using documents and materials from the United States. Son could not overcome the anticommunist perspective of military historians.

First, Son sees the Jeju 4.3 events as a communist rebellion which had to be suppressed by the military operations. Interestingly, Son (2008) argues that it was not the Jeju branch of the WPSK but the South Jeolla branch of the WPSK, which made the Jeju branch to launch the armed protest on 3 April 1948. He further argues that the massive gathering in 1 March 1947 which led to the 3.1 shooting incident was also planned and directed by the South Jeolla branch of the WPSK. Son supports his argument by using the G-2 Report of the US military (No. 752). However, this report has already been disproved in the official report of the Jeju Commission as unreliable source because there is political intention behind this information. Son does not even mention the Jeju Commission's official report on this point. Thus, in his conclusion, Son (2008) argues: "The guerrillas came under the control of the Central SKLP

[South Korean Labor Party, which is a different translation of the WPSK]) and North Korea."

Second, although Son (2008) claims that he provide 'a balanced and detailed account of the event', he overall disregards the findings of the Jeju Commission and the official report. He clearly states his disapproval of the Jeju Commission by stating: "It was one of major efforts of South Korean government to reestablish modern Korean history on the basis of "venting grudges" of the victims by "unjust violence." Thus, although the Jeju Commission already revealed that 80 percent of killings were committed by the government, Son simply states that both parties committed wrong. This attitude implies that since Son sees the uprising as the communist rebellion, the communist guerrillas are primarily responsible not only for the armed conflict but also for the civilian massacres.

Why do we see the increase of studies on the Jeju 4.3 events by military historians? In order to answer this question, we have to understand political and practical context behind the rise of recent academic interest. The current surge of interest certainly is the result of the current US military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq in the form of irregular and guerrilla warfare with local resistances. With this reality, three aspects of guerrilla warfare drew academic attention in the field of military history: first, non-American counterinsurgency operations, second, special aspects of irregular warfare, and third, US counterinsurgency operations. Interestingly, the Jeju 4.3 events fall under all three categories and draws international attention. However, I am seriously concerned about this new development since most attention is given to the counterinsurgency operations and scholars mostly maintain anti-communist perspective.

The second group of scholars, in which Hun

Joon Kim (2008; 2009) and Tae-Ung Baik (2007) are involved, has a different focus on the Jeju 4.3 events. Scholars focus on the fact that the Jeju 4.3 events are serious and systematic human rights violations caused by the abuse of state power. Scholars are particularly interested in studying why and through what process South Korea established the Jeju Commission and trace sixty years of social movement process. In addition, scholars are interested in the function of the Jeju Commission and evaluating its works and legacies.

In his dissertation, Kim (2008) traced fifty years of movement in Jeju to establish the Jeju Commission. Kim found that strong and persistent civil society activism, mature democracy, sympathetic leadership, and indisputable evidence are four key factors in facilitating the delayed establishment of the truth commission in South Korea. Most importantly, strong and persistent local activism was the single most important basis for the truth commission process. By tracing sixty years of persistent and rugged advocacy, he concludes that local social justice and human rights activists, students and scholars, and journalists, who were mainly motivated by the pursuit of the truth, a sense of justice, empathy and compassion, and historical consciousness, were the pillars of this advocacy. Certainly, there had been a series of significant domestic and international factors. Nevertheless, he argues that these important domestic and international factors would not have come into play if not for the persistent struggle of local activists. Secondly, he also found that local activists made the most of these domestic and international opportunities to create a truth commission through various timely and effective strategies.

The perspective has to do with the recent development in world politics. Over the last

three decades, more and more states have experienced transition either from authoritarianism to democracy. One of the novel features of this transition is that states are increasingly expected to address gross and systemic human rights violations committed by the members of the past regimes. The number of states addressing past violations is increasing ever since the well-known case of trials and a truth commission in Argentina in the mid 1980s. Since then, post-transitional states have increasingly opted in favor of accountability for human rights violations and have used a wide range of measures such as prosecution, truth-telling, lustration of police and security forces, reparations, judicial reform, exhumations and reburials, memorialization, and other guarantees of non-repetition (Roht-Arriaza 2002: 97). The creation of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and the International Criminal Court accelerated the process and the well-known case of South African Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) headed by Archbishop Tutu contributed to spreading truth commissions around the world. In South Korea, former presidents Chun Doo-Hwan and Roh Tae-Woo were convicted on the charge of high treason, murder, and corruption and many truth commissions were created under the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administration.

Internationalization of the Jeju 4.3 Events

Before addressing how to internationalize the Jeju 4.3 events, three key questions should be answered. First, *which aspects* of the Jeju 4.3 events should be internationalized? Second, *why*

do we have to internationalize the Jeju 4.3 events? Third, should the *localization* of the Jeju 4.3 event come before the internationalization? Currently, there are two main perspectives defining the characteristics of the Jeju 4.3 events. The first group sees the Jeju 4.3 events as legitimate uprising against the repressive US occupational forces and their puppet South Korean government. A few further argues that the Jeju 4.3 events is a unification movement because communist insurgents explicitly objected the separate election in the Southern part of the Korean peninsula. The second group sees the Jeju 4.3 events as the civilian massacres and mass sacrifices of Jeju residents. This view also emphasizes the Jeju 4.3 events as major human rights crises in South Korea. In general, scholars view the former perspective as bright, active, and positive portrait of the Jeju 4.3 events while see the latter as dark, passive, and negative one.

However, there is another important perspective, which sees the Jeju 4.3 events as civilian massacres and human rights issues but with much positive perspective. It is the perspective of seeing the Jeju 4.3 events as a social movement, i.e. a successful movement to reveal the truths and restore justice in the midst of harsh suppression by the consecutive anticommunist authoritarian regimes. The Jeju Commission successfully conducted truth-seeking project and revealed the comprehensive and historical truth about the civilian massacres. Thus, the final report, which was released in 2003 after two and a half years of investigation, had a significant impact on South Korean society. The reports contains seven recommendations: first, the government should issue an apology; second, declare a memorial day; third, use the report to educate students and the general public; fourth, establish a memorial park; fifth, provide essential

living expenses to bereaved families; sixth, support excavations of mass graves; and seventh, continuously support further investigation and commemoration projects. What is remarkable is that, so far, almost all of the Jeju Commission's recommendations have been implemented except the declaration of a memorial day.

Immediately after the release of the report in 2003, President Roh Moo-hyun made an official apology to the victims, families, and Jeju islanders. This marked the first apology issued by the head of state regarding human rights violations caused by state violence in South Korea. Moreover, in 2006, President Roh visited Jeju participated in a memorial service for the victims and issued another apology. In addition, the narratives and description in government documents and high school history textbooks has changed since the release of the report. Most textbooks have departed from previous characterization of the events as a communist rebellion and moved toward a more balanced description of the armed uprising and civilian sacrifices. Also, a minimum level of monetary subsidy was selectively given to the victims and their family members who have particularly been suffering economic hardship and physical and mental illness.

Following the recommendation, the Jeju Commission has been engaged in three commemoration projects. The earliest commemoration project was mainly focused on creating the Jeju Peace Memorial Park and Museum. However, victims and activists saw the limitation of these projects and pushed for the major revision of the special act in 2007 to include further commemoration activities by establishing the permanent Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation. On the other hand, the commission launched a long-term excavation project in 2006 to discover

mass graves and find the remains of victims. By 2010, eight out of 151 mass murder sites were unearthed, discovering the remains of over 400 victims so far.

In addition, the Jeju Commission, which was created in 2000, is the lengthiest commission in operation. Even under the current Lee Myung-Bak administration, which basically denies the core value of the commission, the Jeju Commission published the white paper on the commission activities in 2008 and had the 16th plenary session in January this year and additionally decided on 4,000 more victims and family members and approved 12 billion Korean Won for commemoration project. The success of the Jeju Commission is contrasted with the TRCK which recently finished its operation. The TRCK started its operation under the Roh Moo-Hyun administration, which supported the commission activities and finished under the current Lee administration. Thus, the TRCK's activity went downhill when President Lee nominated new chairperson and commissioners. The TRCK had a right to request extension up to two more years but the new chairperson request only for two months and hurriedly closed down.

Finally, the Jeju Commission succeeded in creating the permanent foundation – the Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation. It was not easy to create the foundation because activists and victims had to struggle hard to revise the law. Having a permanent institution is highly important because a truth commission is a temporary organization but its work and legacy can be continued in the permanent institution. All those policy recommendations can be carried out or at least supported by the permanent institution. The Jeju case provides an important model for other truth commissions.

The Jeju 4.3 events are international events in

a sense that mass murders and all other atrocities constitute the crimes against humanity. Thus, for the crimes against humanity, international community does not allow the statute of limitations and provide a case for the universal jurisdiction. What happened in Jeju in the 1940s and 1950s has a huge ramification for people living today and people to come. In addition, apparently, the United States was involved in the process in the form of the occupational forces and military advisors during the massacres.

The experience in Jeju – communist guerrilla warfare, counterinsurgency actions, suppression of truth, and truth commission after democratization – lies within a larger national and international political context. Coupled with decolonization, communist challenges were common in the 1940s and 1950s in Latin America and Southeast Asia and these efforts often met ruthless suppression by the newly independent states, overtly and covertly backed by the United States as the US global strategy of containing Communism. Many military and authoritarian leaders were sustained under the Cold War system, justifying domestic repression in the name of national security and, with the end of the Cold War, overturned by democratic uprising, which further led to seeking individual accountability for past human rights violations. Thus, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of state violence, human rights advocacy, and transitional justice in South Korea since 1947, the Jeju massacres and the subsequent political process has to be situated within experience of other cases not only within South Korea but also around the world.

The final question we have to ask is whether localization (or nationalization) should come before internationalization of the Jeju 4.3 events. The best way is to pursue localization and

internationalization at the same time. Certainly, there are still remaining domestic issues such as additional investigations, commemoration projects, welfare of victims and their families, and individual reparations for the victims. However, efforts to internationalization should go hand-in-hand with domestic efforts since both will reinforce each other. The domestic process can be empowered by the developments outside the borders and certainly, domestic developments will help internationalization of the Jeju 4.3 events. In this process, the Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation should link both domestic and international efforts and should function as a hub.

Conclusion: Roads to Internationalization

In this section, I will provide three more practical and feasible roads to the internationalization of the Jeju 4.3 events: first, to translate and distribute materials that are already available domestically; second, to secure enough manpower to internationalize the Jeju 4.3 events and provide continuously supports; and finally, to facilitate the networks and communicate with international governmental and nongovernmental organizations and to affiliate with other domestic and international institutions.

First, internationalization should start using materials that are already available. Domestically, there have been a considerable number of important research and official documents on the Jeju 4.3 events. It is important to translate these works into English and disseminate them as widely as possible. The most urgent project is to translate the official report and distribute the report to major national and university libraries

around the world. The official report should be the primary source of information for those who want to know about the Jeju 4.3 events. Currently, it is highly likely that the recent works of military historians may be read as a primary source due to a lack of English publication. In addition, if possible, the white paper of the Jeju Commission published in 2008 should also be translated and distributed.

I should note a few details on the translation project. It is highly important to have at least two scholars supervise and thoroughly review the translated version of the report before publication: one Korean scholar who is fluent in English and has knowledge on the Jeju 4.3 events and the other native English-speaking scholar who specializes in law, social science, or history. A thorough review process is required because there are many details that should be communicated accurately in English such as its meaning, usage, implications, and connotation. The current official translation of the Jeju 4.3 events – ‘the Jeju 4.3 incident’ – is a good example.

The use of ‘incident (*sageon*)’ is a mistranslation since it reduces the scope and duration of not only the guerrilla warfare and counter-insurgency campaign over seven years but also grave human rights violations. In Korean, *sageon* literally means an event which causes social problem and attracts social attention and does not have an English connotation of a minor or subordinate event. It is most appropriate to understand *sageonas* ‘an event’ in this context and I use ‘events’ to stress that the Jeju 4.3 events are complex and multifaceted events with a series of human rights violations. Second, most of people outside Asia do not know what ‘4.3’ stands for since the date is not written in this way in English speaking countries. Thus,

further explanation is needed to clarify that major historical events are remembered by the date on which they occurred. For example, the Korean War (1950-1953), which broke out on 25 June 1950, is referred to as the '6.25 War.' It has to be mentioned that, with in this tradition, a series of armed conflicts in Jeju, triggered by a surprise attack by communist guerrillas on 3 April 1948, is commonly referred to as the Jeju 4.3 events.

Second, the Jeju society must secure enough manpower or personnel to internationalize the Jeju 4.3 events and provide continuously supports. In order to internationalize the Jeju 4.3 events, it is important to secure those people who are interested in and devoted to internationalization. The first group of people is students and scholars who are primarily responsible for creating and disseminating the knowledge. The Jeju society should support those scholars who are studying and writing about the Jeju 4.3 events both inside and outside the country. International conference is a good opportunity to invite prominent scholars and ask them to consider and write on the Jeju 4.3 events. The problem of most international conferences is the fact that they are mostly a one-time event. In order for the international conference to be effective, it should be a regular – annual or biannual – conference and scholar should publish their conference proceedings into books, articles, and book chapters. The creation of the international scholarship and fellowship program is also a good opportunity to invite scholars. The Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation should be a place where scholars who are interested in studying the Jeju 4.3 events or other similar massacre cases in South Korea should conduct research.

Finally, the Jeju society must establish the

networks with international governmental and nongovernmental organizations and also with other cases of massacres inside and outside the country. There are many international organizations interested in knowing and learning about the truth commission experiences. For example, the Office of High Commissioner for Human Right, the United Nations Development Program, and the International Criminal Court are interested in learning truth commission experiences. New international NGOs like the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) have emerged and many old NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have included transitional justice into their programs.

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