The hegemon and the minjung:
Top-down and bottom-up forces in Republic of Korea democratisation

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ABSTRACT

The twentieth-century history of the ROK (Republic of Korea) is arguably the story of a people's long struggle for freedom from authoritarian rule. This essay will explore the struggle waged by the people between 1980 and 1987 in ROK to secure civil and political rights denied by military dictatorship. This essay will critique the organisational platform of the movement and use the Spiral Model of human rights norm socialisation (Risse et al, 1999) to understand the regime response to the advocacy movement. This will be contextualised alongside the role of the US (United States of America) as the hegemonic power in ROK in either supporting or denouncing ROK human rights violations. Central will be the role of discourse[1] in enabling the construction of counter-hegemonic resistance 'from below,' drawing from Gramscian concepts of a constructed public realm in which discursive forces battle with challenges to hegemony[2]. The essay will conclude by suggesting the successes of the movement, in moving ROK towards norm internalisation, were facilitated by the subversive discourses of the minjung ('people') resulting in an irresistible counter-hegemonic discourse against the Chun Doo Hwan regime.

Introduction

The twentieth-century history of the ROK (Republic of Korea) is arguably the story of a people's long struggle for freedom from authoritarian rule. This essay will explore the struggle waged by the people between 1980 and 1987 in ROK to secure civil and political rights denied by military dictatorship. This essay will critique the organisational platform of the movement and use the Spiral Model of human rights norm socialisation (Risse *et al*, 1999) to understand the regime response to the advocacy movement.

This will be contextualised alongside the role of the US (United States of America) as the hegemonic power in ROK in either supporting or denouncing ROK human rights violations. Central will be the role of discourse[1] in enabling the construction of counter-hegemonic resistance 'from below,' drawing from Gramscian concepts of a constructed public realm in which discursive forces battle with challenges to hegemony[2]. The essay will conclude by suggest-

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1) Practices which regulate truth and value (Mills, 2004)
2) The ability of the dominant class to project its ideologies as 'common sense' and 'natural' (Chandler, 2000)

ing the successes of the movement, in moving ROK towards norm internalisation, were facilitated by the subversive discourses of the minjung ('people') resulting in an irresistible counter-hegemonic discourse against the Chun Doo Hwan regime.

Civil Society and Social Change

Civil society is too often a "normative concept, a distinctive vision of a desirable social order" (Hann and Dunn, 1996: 2) about how the interests of the individual should be mediated to the state. These normative and ethnocentric debates do not easily translate to non-western cultures, such as those in East Asia (Ibid). As such, rather than utilising normative constructions of civil society, this essay will explore its function as a public realm of contestation to discursively challenge violating regimes.

Gramsci and Habermas were drawn to civil society as an ideological sphere wherein hegemonic forces seek to consolidate privilege. Habermas saw the public sphere as representing class interests, where "private people come together as a public" (Habermas, 1989: 27) to mediate values to the state. Gramsci further critiqued civil society as an arena of cultural and symbolic challenge between social classes wherein informal networks and movements "seek to reform not only the polity, but also the institutions of civil society itself" (Fleming, 2002: 2). States exert power through direction (discourse) and dominance (force) and this can be challenged in civil society through intellectual and moral leadership (Showstack Sassoon, 1987).

Gramsci likens the public realm of civil society

in liberal states to "a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks", of which only the outer manifestations are state organs themselves (Showstack Sassoon, 1987:114). As such, highly developed, plural and open civil societies act as buffers protecting state institutions, whereas more authoritarian regimes rely on physical manifestations of the state, with a much narrower public realm. Therefore, within civil society there is a "war of position" (Showstack Sassoon, 1987: 197) to further vested interests in the public realm and influence direction and dominance through discursive argument. This conception of a struggle against the defences of the state is invaluable to understanding human rights movements within civil society space.

The Spiral Model and Argumentative Persuasion

Risse et al (1999) set out to study the social construction of human rights in norm-violating states through the advocacy actions of TANs (Transnational Advocacy Networks). TANs are networks of non-state actors which interact with each other as human rights advocates, but also with states and with international organisations (Keck and Sikkink, 1999). The function of the TAN is to initiate a "boomerang throw" (Risse et al, 1999: 18), whereby the state is bypassed and the violation is brought on to the international agenda by appealing to INGOs (International Non-Governmental Organisations) who in turn "convince international human rights organisations, donor institutions, and/or great powers to pressure norm-violating states" (Ibid). Such a "boomerang throw" functions within the war of position by engaging international civil society and adding an international dimension to Gramsci's

"fortresses and earthworks" (Showstack Sassoon, 1987). In a counter-discourse of "ideas and communicative processes" (Risse *et al*, 1999: 7) TANs aid in moral consciousness-raising, empowering and legitimising domestic opposition groups, and challenging norm-violators in a "battleground of ideas" (Ibid).

State responses to advocacy movements have been reproduced in the five-stage Spiral Model: repression; denial; tactical concessions; prescriptive status; and rule-consistent behaviour (Risse *et al*, 1999). Since Korean partition all ROK regimes have had to engage at the tactical concessions stage in part due to the conscious construction of a liberal-democratic identity in opposition to the authoritarian DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) north of the 38th parallel (Lee, 2007). Therefore, while ROK has often found itself a norm violator, it has been discursively precluded from outwardly denying norm validity (Hinzpeter, 2000). This case study follows the ROK as it progresses from this tactical concessions stage to prescriptive status, whereby norms are codified in law and institutionalised in the state (Risse *et al*, 1999). Presenting opportunities for advocacy networks, violator states are forced into "argumentative rationality" (Risse *et al*, 1999: 254), whereby argumentative consistency becomes discursively regulated. For example, when violating norms guaranteed under the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), the regime has to construct a discourse of exception - normally referencing the constructed threats of communism and DPRK - rather than deny their validity outright. For this reason, the battle for human rights in ROK has largely been one of discourse control between an international hegemon, a military government and an

oftfragmented civil society.

1980 - 1987: The evolution of a discourse

Background

In 1990 ROK ratified the ICCPR, almost a decade after DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) had done the same in the North (UN, 2010). A supposed model of liberal democratic statehood (Lee, 2007), ROK had routinely violated basic ICCPR rights through the repressive Yushin Constitution[3]. Effectively in place from 1972 until 1987[4], the Yushin restricted fundamental civil and political rights and was compounded by periods of martial law and civilian massacre (*ibid.*).

In 1979, student bodies alongside labour groups and religious organisations instigated the Pusan-Masan Uprising, against the oppressive *Yushin* Constitution[5], threatening the regime of ROK President Park (Armstrong, 2007). The Park regime was shaken and while contemplating strategic options the President was assassinated by a member of his clique. His Prime Minister, Choi Gyu-ha took power and immediately promised to restore civil and political rights (Lee, 2007). The military quickly seized power in a coup

3) Yushin is discussed in more detail in Armstrong (2007) and Kim (2008)

4) ROK had been a consistent violator of basic human rights since inception and continued post-.civil under the regime of Rhee Syngman. Prior to this the unified peninsular had experienced repressive Japanese occupation (Armstrong, 2007).

5) The *Yushin* Constitution banned severely restricted civil and political rights and mere criticism of it could lead to a 15-year prison term (Armstrong, 2007; Kim, 2008)

d''état on 12th December 1979, led by General Chun Doo Hwan, with President Choi remaining as but a figurehead. From 1980 to 1987 the country was effectively ruled under the military dictatorship of Chun who systematically violated even peremptory international law (AI 1981, AI 1987). The forces of civil society began to swarm, demanding a transition to democracy, the end of martial law and the *Yushin* Constitution. Critically, civil society was fragmented between the tripartite of students, workers and religious groups. All sections were active - despite oppression under the *Yushin* - but weak and uncoordinated. Furthermore, US concerns were with stability and at best a gradual transition to democracy (Reddit, 1980a), with the US Ambassador William H. Gleysteen Jr even claiming opponents of the dictatorial *Yushin* were extremists and the citizenry "garlic and pepper eating combatants" (Katsiaficas, 2006). Despite the disdain in which they were held by elite factions in Seoul and Washington, the people of ROK were to defy the oppression and rise up to achieve one of the greatest victories for democracy yet seen in East Asia. This culminated in the June Declaration[6] of 1987 which promised an end to a century of unrest and democratic struggle (Kim, 2000).

Organisational Platform and Gwangju

Under *Yushin* the "critical public" (Gwon, cited in Jung and Kim, 2009: 4) had been overwhelmed by militarisation (Presidential Truth Commission, 2004) and the military coup roused civil society, which saw its discursive space

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6) On June 29 1987 the Chun regime made civil and political rights guarantees that were to lead to full democracy and eventual widespread rights implementation (see Kim, 2000)

being squeezed by military encroachment, but a lack of organisational strength handicapped the response. The regime was still engaging in argumentative rationality around norm compliance, using "outraged denunciation" (Risse *et al*, 1999: 253) to excuse norm violation and framing opponents as communists and DPRK agents, a discourse that had "bewitched" and "warped" the national psyche (Lee, 2007: 3). Disingenuous President Choi continued to make promises to dismantle the *Yushin* Constitution, while General Chun claimed military rule was needed to discourage moves by the DPRK (Hinzpeter, 2000). Elections were promised within a matter of months, a move supported by the US (*Ibid*), but civil society was restive.

Students, the core of ROK civil society (Lee, 2007), took to the streets to demand democracy, de-militarisation of campuses, freedom of the press and an end to the *Yushin* Constitution (Ryo and Jung, 2004). Simultaneously, the labour movement scaled-up staging of sit-ins and demanded standard working hours, legalisation of trade unions and trade dispute resolutions, while religious organisations continued their vigils and support (Shin and Hwang, 2004). United, these groups would have posed a significant threat to the Chun regime, yet "they did not know fully how to organize their strength, whom to confront, or how to fight" (Shin and Hwang, 2004: 49). The movement lacked organisational expertise or a platform to challenge the fledgling regime and this was highlighted when marching pro-democracy students were turned away from joining a labour dispute by trade union leaders (Ryu and Jung, 2004). To compound matters, the regime consolidated its directional control by labelling the opposition communists and DPRK agents (Ryu and Jung, 2004), stating

sympathisers were "playing into the hands of Communist [DPRK]" (Reditt, 1980a). This is a common tactic of regimes locked into argumentative rationality, as they "ridicule their critics and (...) reject specific allegations of norm violations" (Risse *et al*, 1999: 252).

Nevertheless, the students mobilised and in May 1980, assembled the biggest demonstration in 15 years. Despite the government "hinting that the timetable for democratisation might be speeded up" (Sterba, 1980) over a million students and citizens marched in Seoul for democracy, yet on the night of the 17th May the regime cracked down, arresting opposition leaders in Seoul and the south-western city of Gwangju. Claiming DPRK troop movements towards the border region – something the US denied (Reditt, 1980b) – Martial Law was extended nationwide, suspending the National Assembly and giving General Chun absolute power (Shin and Hwang, 2003). The organs of the state had infiltrated the public realm and the weak platform of students, workers and church groups was to resist the anti-communist discourse. The hegemony of "ideas and communicative processes" (Risse *et al*, 1999: 7) combined with increasing manifestations of state power through martial law meant the state was both directing (discursively) and dominating (forcibly) the people's movement. The US, despite maintaining it was "deeply disturbed" by developments, promised to "react strongly to any external attempts to exploit the unstable situation" (Reditt, 1980c), sending an implicit signal of support to Seoul.

Counter hegemony in Gwangju

Martial law was extended on 17th May and troops were sent to occupy university campuses to quell unrest. Only the students in Gwangju refused to follow the precedent set in Seoul to discontinue the protests (Shin and Hwang, 2004). The ROK military arrested student leaders around Gwangju in the night, yet the remaining students vowed to continue the resistance and met on campus the next day (Ibid) convinced that if President Carter witnessed their plight the US would "intervene on their behalf" (Lee, 2007: 51). Early on 18th May hundreds of Special Forces troops stormed the university under orders to arrest all student leaders, and by afternoon in response 2,000 protestors had gathered to confront them (Armstrong, 2007). Innocent people were dragged out of coffee shops and attacked with fixed bayonets and a young boy was even heard to ask his mother when "their" army was coming (Katsiaficas, 2001: 88). When news crept through of the US 7th Fleet being relocated to ROK waters the people of Gwangju assumed it was coming to their aid (Lee, 2007). However, The Times reported that they had been sent "as a warning to North Korea that the United States is firmly behind the Korean government" (Reditt, 1980d).

The brutal conflict raged for two days and by 20th May up to 200,000 citizens, many armed, were out on the streets, unifying "workers, farmers, students and people from all walks of life" (Katsiaficas, 2001: 88). Joined by taxis, buses, trucks and cars, the protests peaked on the evening of the 21st and the army began to retreat from the city (Lee, 2007). Despite extreme suppression, the people had unified and driven the troops towards the city limits. Gramsci's "fortresses and earthworks" had been overturned in Gwangju and for six days the citizens ran a liberated commune, appealing for international support. The *Yushin* Constitution was dismantled

and the movement found a voice through a free press. Internal bulletins were published and the movement became fully integrated between student bodies, labour unions, intellectuals and the wider citizenry. The fragmented organisational platform of the nationwide movement had been transformed by brutality into unity and it was determining its own direction and dominance (Showstack Sassoon, 1987). Problematic for citizens of Gwangju was that while they had achieved internal consistency, their discourse had no capital on a national platform, where the press - more hostile than ever - denounced them, claiming the nation "was on the verge of communisation" (Ryu and Jung, 2004: 96).

Meanwhile, the US, as supreme military command in ROK (Presidential Truth Commission, 2004), confirmed it had released elite paratroopers to aid in the suppression of the revolt (Reditt, 1980c). Much of the international coverage was in an anti-communist vein (Scott-Stokes, 2000) and attempted "boomerang throws" (Risse et al, 1999) failed due to censorship and persecution of foreign journalists suspected of sympathising with the movement (Presidential Truth Commission, 2004); "the insurrection was taking place in complete isolation from the rest of the world" (Scott-Stokes, 2000: 111). In the early hours of the 27th May, ROK paratroopers stormed and easily re-took the city with up to 2,000 civilians massacred (Katsiaficas, 2001). Gwangju had been suppressed, but its memory was to live on as "a vehicle of democratisation" (Shin and Hwang, 2003: 67).

'Top down' moves by the US and Chun regime

The US urged caution in response to the massacre, but stressed General Chun was at liberty to suppress communist insurgencies (Lee, 2007). The buoyed regime instigated an unprecedented campaign of suppression and Chun elevated himself to President in August (Ibid). Martial law and the Yushin Constitution were strengthened and a national "social purification" campaign was launched (The Times, 1980a) with labour unions, student groups and political organisations being severely restricted with up to 35,000 people sent to purification camps (Ryu and Jung, 2004). Journalists held not to be sincere anti-communists were dismissed and re-educated, as was anyone who had been on strike or who questioned the military (Scott-Stokes, 2000). This was followed by "a massive and coercive campaign to 'cleanse' the entire civil society" (Kim, 2000: 78). Further, a change in administration in the US seemed to bode ill for the regime's opponents, as President Chun was the first Head of State to be invited to the White House by President Reagan in 1981. When the issue of human rights was brought up Chun was reassured by Reagan that "human rights survive as a concept, but in a broadened context" (The White House, 1981). The hegemony of the state was absolute in terms of dominance and direction (Showstack Sassoon, 1987) and appeals for US mediation were met with military support for the Chun regime.

Bottom-up Reaction to Gwangju

Activists who were engaged in a "scientific anlaysis" of the failures of the movement (Ibid) highlighted weaknesses in cooperation, communications and disunity of disparate groups. The increased military encroachment on civil society limited the moves of the network, and the war of position needed to open up alternative fronts.

A weak organisational capacity hindered effective international links previously, but Gwangju - becoming a critical juncture - had highlighted ROK norm violations internationally and the network instigated a successful "boomerang throw". AI (Amnesty International) increased its role and in August 1980 they attempted to enter ROK and undertake a fact-finding mission on allegations of torture (Reditt, 1980a). They were turned away, but by the turn of the year AI were successively getting norm violations into the international media (The Times, 1980b; The New York Times, 1981), rousing public interest.

By 1981 it was engaged in an international campaign to highlight torture and prisoners of conscience, questioning the ethics of ROK hosting the 1988 Olympic Games in a norm-violating country (Crook, 1981). In 1981 it also released an international report on repression and political prisoners, appealing to the UN for action against the Chun regime (AI, 1981). Gwangju became a legitimacy deficit (Shin and Hwang, 2003) for the Chun regime and it released 2,000 prisoners and had civil society restrictions eased to avoid further agitation (Presidential Truth Commission, 2004). Crucially, this allowed the movement scope to regroup, as many opposition leaders were given amnesties. The pressure continued, and in 1986 another AI report on ROK human rights was released, again highlighting allegations of torture and police brutality (AI, 1986). For the first time, the advocacy movement was beginning to direct the discourse.

The Growth of the Minjung

Gwangju was isolated by regionalism, class interests and a divided movement, but for those

days of liberation there had grown a sense of togetherness that united the people above all else; the ideology of the *minjung* ('the people') was to become the "driving force of change" (Lee, 2007: 1). Activists realised that disunity was a major hindrance to their cause and moves were made to unite the student and labour movements, along with religious groups. In true Gramscian style, the *minjung* arose "as a product of discursive contestations in a field of political, cultural and symbolic forces" (Ibid). *Minjung*, meaning a people together in identity and purpose, not only constructed a discourse of activism, but of historical deconstruction (Kim, 2000).

This realignment of the movement, between its outward looking internationalism and more inward looking cultural discourse, initiated a process of historical deconstruction (*Ibid*). It highlighted the people's betrayal by foreign oppressors, such as the Japanese, US and the military, but crucially, it also positioned the *minjung* as central to the failure and the people were to become the "true subject of historical development" (Lee, 2007: 2). It constructed a critical awareness of the process of decolonisation and self-defined liberation. As opposed to previous movements, the *minjung* were no longer based on personal networks, or regionalism, but "began to have solid organisational support and clearer plans for (······) reform" (Scalapino and Lee, 1989: 84).

The *minjung*, framed by the injustice of Gwangju, brought people together as never before, as "1983 marked the end of the externally imposed hibernation of the triple solidarity of students, workers and churches" (Lee, 2007: 82). The *minjung* ideology began to construct its

own discourse (Presidential Truth Commission, 2004) and the National Student Coalition for Democracy Movement was formed, the first nationwide coalition since the protests which brought down ex-President Rhee Syngman (Kim, 2000). Also created was the Youth Coalition for Democracy Movement, composed of former student activists now engaged in labour and social movements, creating a crucial forum to (...) unite the older and younger generations" (Scalapino and Lee, 1989: 83). President Chun found his position weakened as a strengthened platform and counter-hegemonic discourse was forming.

US military occupation and military dictatorship were transformed to represent the failure of the *minjung* to truly de-colonise after Japanese surrender and the movement openly targeted past and present military regimes as remnants of Japanese collaboration (*Ibid*). Furthermore, the *minjung* were self-aware, as the discourse positioned the people as complicit for failure to truly decolonize and address past injustice; the people were thus empowered to take ownership of their suppression (Lee, 2007).

This alienated the regime from the people and the *minjung* began to target US interests. Whereas pre-Gwangju, the US were viewed as a benevolent force, now the coalition saw US complicity as Chun's Achilles heel (Kim, 2000). The US role in Gwangju had been a "rude awakening" to the movement and it shattered naïve notions of US values and interests (Lee, 2007: 116). Despite the US being on record as a human rights champion, it was clear that these were often secondary to foreign policy objectives and this self-identity now represented a target for the movement that could weaken the Chun

regime. The decision was made to open up another front, by targeting US cultural centres, protesting at the US Embassy and disrupting a visit by Vice-President Reagan in April 1982 (The Times, 1982).

Intellectuals began to take a leading role in the *minjung* and whereas previously appeals had been limited to the working class or regional peasantry, it was now inclusive and nationwide. Publications began to appear, such as the "Path to Democracy" produced by students, professors, journalists, intellectuals and professionals (Scalapino and Lee, 1989: 83). Student and Church groups actively cooperated with restored labour unions, such as Korean Council for Labour Welfare and Chonggye Apparel Union – most importantly, they became "tightly united and effectively coordinated under the leadership of national umbrella organisations", such as the Council of Movement for People and Democracy and the National Congress for Democracy and Reunification (*Ibid*). Intellectuals and students began to infiltrate factories and workplaces to coordinate and recruit, and night schools were opened up by volunteers drawing on liberation pedagogies (Presidential Truth Commission, 2004).

Korean traditions and culture became central to the movement, influenced by its intellectualisation and the experience of historical betrayal (Lee, 2007). Donghak (Eastern Learning) was a native religion preaching equality which had inspired uprisings in the past and it became a vehicle for an inclusive discourse on human rights, alongside other religious traditions across the country, such as Buddhism and Catholicism. To a nation arguably resistant to a Western discourse of rights it allowed the *minjung* to draw from native cultural artefacts, which served

to further isolate the regime.

The lack of explicit appeal to international human rights instruments by the *minjung* may be explained by a history of resistance to foreign influence on the Korean peninsula (Cumings, 2005), arguably exemplified by the *Donghak* religion and later rebellion of the late-nineteenth century (Cumings, 2005: 116). *Donghak* (Eastern Learning) − a combination of native Korean beliefs, Taosim, Confucianism and Buddhism − arose in opposition to *Seohak* (Western Learning) − Western science and ethics (Chung, 1980: 370). A religion, but also a philosophy and liberation discourse, *Donghak* became a localised vehicle for rights claims (Lee, 2007: 58). Its strong emphasis on human equality and peace resonated not only with an oppressed peasant class, but also an increasingly affluent middle class (Kim, 2008: 4). Theologies such as *Donghak* infused the *minjung*, contributing to the social ontologies which minimised appeals to Western institutions (Kruger, 2001).

This localised discourse construction can be explored further by looking the right to freedom of expression. Despite supposed incompatibility between Confucianism[7] and political civil rights (Barr, 2000), ROK has rich traditions of political satire (van Erven, 1988). *Madangguk*, a satirical combination of dance and theatrical performance which arose in the oppressive environment of the 1970s, harks back to shamanistic traditions of mask dancing and performance and became a subversive polemic for the rural peasantry[8] (Choi, 1993). It expanded and a

tradition once confined to small rural villages became a textual tool to challenge the regime (Shin and Hwang, 2003). Students put on anti-regime shows, using satire as a means of freedom of expression, something deep-rooted in their cultural traditions. By the 1980s *madangguk* had become a social movement in itself and central to *minjung* identity, with its discourse becoming "a language [representing] the life of the oppressed" (Choi, 1993: 93). The *minjung* thus reclaimed a history that had betrayed them, as *madangguk* "rescue[d] the people whose voice had been silenced" (*ibid.*), constructing a discourse on rights "through their everyday practices" (Rajagopal, 2007: 275).

The *madangguk* reconstructed the social memory and history of the twentieth century, becoming "an alternative, even utopian, form of cultural and political expression" (Lee, 2003: 556). Performances targeted Chun and US complicity in civilian massacres as a vehicle for rights claims and the historical discourse itself was challenged by the *minjung*[9] (Shin and Hwang, 2003: 67). While a Western account of human rights might expect appeals to the universal discourse when challenging rights violations, the *minjung* preferred appeals to its newly constructed discourse of historical betrayal, *minjung* solidarity and native belief systems (Presidential Commission, 2004: 293).

At a time of widespread restrictions on free speech, *madangguk* flourished underground in

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7) ROK is commonly referred to as the most Confucian of all Asian nations (Cumings, 2005)

8) The film "The King and the Clown" (2005) gives a humorous take on this tradition of political subversion.

9) A central project was the re-.categorisation of the Gwangju and Jeju *incidents* as *massacres*, which the government strongly opposed. There was further a critique of how ROK had never truly decolonised or brought Japanese collaborators to justice, many of whom were still in government (Lee, 2007).

factories, village squares, markets and on university campuses (*ibid.*) as "the only kind of political theatre (······) able to evade censorship" (van Erven, 1988: 105). Students had always been central to social movements in ROK and the subversion within *madangguk* created a buzz of advocacy around campuses. The "social life of rights" (Wilson, 2003) was carried on a tide of education, as students infiltrated factories and workplaces to solidify a unifying identity between classes and regions. Even while deep in studies, students would work undercover in factories doing hard labour and consciousness-raising[10] among the working class (Presidential Commission, 2004: 294). The *minjung*, through living texts such as *madangguk* and native theologies critiqued their own subjectification, realising their oppression as the continuance of a failed decolonisation project; the movement and its discourse of resistance re-positioned the subject, ensuring "the *minjung* (······) are the protagonists of history" (Kruger, 2001).

This selective portrayal of the culture of the human rights movement in ROK, such as the language and social life of rights (Short, 2009), is fundamental to understanding the changes happening in the political sphere at the time. Despite a universalising discourse on rights, the ROK case highlights how cultures nurture local roots, over transnational branches, which was reflected in the diverse discourse of the *minjung* and *madangguk* as expressions of rights vernacularisation (Goodale, 2007: 24).

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10) The original '*conscientisation*' is taken from Freire and refers to a form of revolutionary education to allow the realisation of structures of oppression by the oppressed (Freire, 1996).

Paradigm shift

Prior to these cultural waves that would sweep the country and immediately after the massacre at Gwangju, as outlined earlier, Chun was assured by Reagan that human rights were conceptual and open to interpretation (The White House, 1981). However, seven years later the *minjung* movement had succeeded in forcing Chun to reform (Waters, 1996). The thawing of the Cold War had momentarily led to improved relations between the two Koreas and Washington was less supportive of an abusive Chun (Kim, 2000: 178). The regime was left "cornered" (Scalapino and Lee, 1989: 92) in the days leading up to the June Declaration of 1987, as students, workers, religious groups and the middle classes formed under umbrella organisations and millions took to the streets (Kim, 2008: 3). To highlight US complicity in propping up decades of anti-democratic regimes the minjung actively began targeting US interests, such as military bases and cultural centres (Shin, 2003: 73).

International awareness of ROK was increasing and Chun, for the first time, seemed sensitive to condemnation and international shaming (Kim, 2000). Having secured both the 1986 Asian Games and 1988 Seoul Olympics, he made conciliatory gestures to legitimate his regime for the coming events (Scalapino and Lee, 1989). The resulting tactical liberalisation of civil society in 1983 led to an unleashing of the *minjung* below, which was coupled with increased US pressure from above, alongside international mobilisation among the human rights community. Despite the state having lost its direction and coercive power over civil society, the US was still cautious, with commander of US forces General Wickham Jr still insisting that Koreans

were "lemming-like," needing a "strong leader" (Lee, 2007: 117) and not ready for democracy (Bandow, D, 1987).

Such rhetoric may have led Chun to misread the climate, as he broke off negotiations for constitutional reform in frustration. Stating he no longer wished to "waste his time" (Kim, 2000: 155) Chun vowed to retain the *Yushin* and install close aide Roh Tae Woo as his successor. Reminiscent of the 1980 extension of martial law, civil society was roused, but this time the *minjung* was united under national umbrella organisations and a unifying ideology.

Matters came to a head in May 1987 as news was released of the death of student Park Jongcheol who was arrested previously for actively resisting Chun. Park was severely tortured after refusing to give up names of those in the student movement. The murder took place in January earlier that year, although news of it had been suppressed. The Catholic Priest"s Association for Justice had uncovered the story and released it on May 18th 1987, the anniversary of Gwangju. In response, a mass demonstration was called for 10th June to protest the death. Further, on the 9th June, during a related demonstration, a further student was killed as student Lee Han-yeol was struck on the head with a tear gas canister thrown by police (Kim, 2000). These two events were central to and precipitated what became known as the June Uprising, as millions took to the streets nationwide, culminating on 10th June when over a million and a half people demonstrated. The unity of the *minjung* and its counter-hegemonic force now began to awaken.

With the regime weakened Chun prioritised retaining power, however, as further unrest could

threaten regional security the US discouraged a military solution (Kim, 2000: 180), making civil rights concessions the pragmatic course for both. The contrast with Gwangju in 1980 could not be starker, as the once blind eye of the US had become trained on Chun, precluding a military response and pushing him towards the negotiating table (Shin and Hwang, 2003: 77); without US support and with the approaching Seoul Olympics, Chun could ill afford pariah status (Young, 2004: 74). The interest-synchronisation between the major players of the US, the Chun regime and the *minjung* made the dismantling of the Yushin and democratic elections irresistible.

Whereas in Gwangju Chun had the liberty to suppress the uprising with the military, this time around the US urged restraint. Keen to avoid the culpability that had been so damaging in Gwangju, the US went on record early on to call for "dialogue and compromise" (Kim, 2000: 179). The US aimed to "lay down a marker" (*Ibid*) to avoid any military confrontation and Amnesty were again using the coverage to put the spotlight on the US relationship with the military regime (Armstrong, 2007). Such was the ferocity of the movement that the Reagan administration began to fear a Philippines-style revolution (Scalapino and Lee, 1989: 89)[11] and US strategy had to appease civil society to avoid insurrection (Habermas, 1986). Unlike previously when the US interest lay in ensuring there was a hard-line leadership to deter DPRK aggression, the strength of the *minjung* had exerted sufficient pressure to reconfigure the sociopolitical landscape (cf. Waters, 1996).

11) The oppressive President Marcos was propped up by US interests, leading to widespread anti-.US sentiment and eventual revolution (Scalapino and Lee, 1989)

Restrained by the international hegemon, the regime yielded to the *minjung* in the war of position. In a move that was unthinkable seven years earlier, newly appointed leader Roh released the June 29 Declaration, guaranteeing the "restoration of civil rights to all black-listed political leaders, protection of human rights, the lifting of press restrictions, restoration of campus autonomy and the promotion of free political party activities" (KBS, 2009). Seven years earlier similar demands had been met with military suppression and 2,000 deaths, yet in June 1987 Chun had been neutered and the June Declaration put ROK on the path to democracy. The regime lamented its yielding of power[12], but it had survived a mass public uprising through pragmatic decision-making (Young, 2004: 69). The *minjung* furthermore had secured a landmark victory in its battle for human rights. The ROK had graduated, after over four decades paying lip service to human rights, to institutionalisation of international norms and had moved from tactical concession to the prescriptive stage of the Spiral Model. There was still some way to go before ROK had come to terms with its past human rights violations and the journey is still far from over, as attested by the yet incomplete Presidential Truth Commission (2004), but it was clear a corner had been turned and there was to be no turning back — as yet.

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12) Despite huge public opposition to the ruling power, Chun had calculated he would retain office due to the idiosyncratic regionalism that divides ROK politics, a calculation that was borne out in the elections of 1988 when the opposition vote was split between Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung, allowing Roh to retain the Premiership (Graham, 1991: 114).

Conclusions

Norm institutionalisation in ROK was far from inevitable and it was dependent on constructed parallelisation of interests between power blocs. More than just constructing a local discourse of human rights, the socio-political landscape was manipulated, while fortuitous political opportunity structures, such as the Seoul Olympics and the Philippines revolution, deterred military suppression of the people. The *minjung* achieved a remarkable turnaround. The broadening of the platform base, particularly to coordinate the tripartite of students, labour and religious organizations was crucial in moving from a reactionary force to an agenda-setting coalition. Human rights advocacy is often a battle over identity (Risse *et al*, 1999), and reconstructing historical subjectivity enabled the movement to isolate the regime as another betrayal. This limited the moves of the ruling class to paint activists as communist or DPRK agents. In short, the *minjung* had managed to construct a new discourse in which the Chun Presidency was peripheralised as an historic aberration, constructing an irresistible bottom-up force. Recalling Gramsci's "fortresses and earthworks", the movements of the *minjung* had coincided with concessions and hesitancy from the Chun regime to open up a space in the public realm, which once populated could not be isolated and suppressed by force.

In addition to this domestic reconstruction of identities and discourses, we saw an appeal to international powers, such as the US. In a major reconfiguration from 1980, the movement challenged the US identity as a human rights champion. Although confrontational, the anti-Americanism of the post-Gwangju campaign caused the US to

reconsider its complicity in suppression, and in unison with Amnesty advocacy, the international community pressured the US to apply top-down pressure on Chun to reform. The US refusal to authorise military suppression of the June Uprising in 1987 was the seminal moment when the sheer weight of the *minjung* and allies forced Chun to institutionalise a new constitution, guaranteeing human rights. Due to the elongated tactical concessions stage and the reversion to oppression, this case study is not an obvious candidate for the Spiral Model of human rights institutionalization. Despite the staggered progression and limited trans-nationalism, the combination of top-down and bottom-up forces in achieving change means an analysis of the developments between the Gwangju Uprising and the June Uprising will be of value to advocacy movements similarly aiming for discursive and hegemonic change.

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