

**EXCISE**

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

IS/FPC/CDR *TRB* Date: *9/13/93*

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ACTION EA-12

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MR Cases Only: \_\_\_\_\_  
 EO Citations \_\_\_\_\_  
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**P 310835Z JUL 80**  
 FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
 TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8107  
 INFO AMEMBASSY BEIJING  
 AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
 SA CINCUNC KS  
 CHJUSMAG SEOUL KS  
 COMUSKOREA SEOUL KS//BJ-IS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SEOUL 09829

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E.O. 12065    XDS-4 07/31/00 (MONJO, JOHN C.) OR-M  
TAGS: PINS PCOV SHUM KS US

**SUBJECT: ASSESSES THE MOOD IN KWANGJU**

REF: SEOUL 6841 (NOTAL)

1. (C - ENTIRE TEXT)

2. THE FOLLOWING ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION IN CHOLLA NAMDO WAS WRITTEN:

**IT IS BASED ON A FOUR-DAY PRIVATE VISIT TO CHOLLANAMDO TWO WEEKS AGO. DURING** \_\_\_\_\_ TALKED WITH A VARIETY OF PEOPLE. THE SAMPLE WAS CERTAINLY WIDE; WHETHER IT WAS GENUINELY REPRESENTATIVE IS LESS CERTAIN. WHILE THIS IS LESS FORMAL AND PERHAPS MORE SUBJECTIVE AND CATEGORICAL THAN MOST FOREIGN SERVICE REPORTS, WE BELIEVE

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IT SERVES AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THE RECORD OF WHAT HAPPENED IN KWANGJU IN MAY, AND TO OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE SCARS THAT REMAIN.

3. IT IS TWO MONTHS SINCE THE KWANGJU INCIDENT, AND KWANGJU IN MANY WAYS HAS RETURNED TO NORMAL. PRIVATELY, HOWEVER, PEOPLE SAY THAT THEY ARE STILL DEEPLY DISTURBED BY WHAT HAPPENED AND THAT NO ONE IS EXEMPT FROM A PERVA-SIVE SENSE OF HORROR.

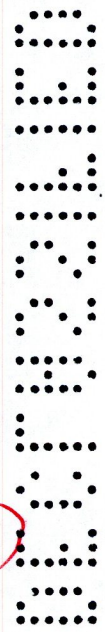
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*4-day visit to Kwangju in mid July 1980 by US Emb office (Monjo)*



HOUSEWIFE SHE KNOWS, A WOMAN PREVIOUSLY BORED BY POLITICS, WHO SAW A SOLDIER DRIVE HIS BAYONET THROUGH THE CHEST OF A YOUNG MAN; NOW SHE TALKS ANGRILY OF POLITICS. DETAILED ACCOUNTS OF WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE INCIDENT ARE STILL CIRCULATED WITH INTEREST, BUT THE REASON FOR THIS SEEMS TO BE CHANGING: DURING AND JUST AFTER THE INCIDENT, WORD OF MOUTH ACCOUNTS SUBSTITUTED FOR THE UNRELIABLE MEDIA AS SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON WHAT WAS HAPPENING. NOW SUCH ACCOUNTS ARE ORAL HISTORY, RECOUNTED AS A MEANS OF KEEPING CONSCIOUSNESS AND INDIGNATION ALIVE. IT IS AS THOUGH KWANGJU SEES REMEMBERING WHAT HAPPENED TO IT AS A DUTY. MANY PEOPLE ARE LESS INTERESTED IN THE FACTUAL CONTENT OF THESE STORIES THAN IN INTERPRETATION. THEY LISTEN GRIMLY TO DISCUSSION OF THE INCIDENT WITH OCCASIONAL NODS THAT AFFIRM NOT FACTS BUT RATHER THEIR INTENT NOT TO FORGET. AND THEY BLUNTLY SAY THAT TO FORGIVE IS ALSO IMPOSSIBLE.

4. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT PEOPLE ARE DETERMINED TO HAVE REVENGE. WHEN TALKING OF THE FUTURE, AND WHETHER VIOLENCE MIGHT ERUPT AGAIN, THEY ARE UNCERTAIN. THE BRUTALITY OF THE PARATROOPERS HAS BRED CAUTION, AND CONFRONTATION AS A POLITICAL TOOL HAS BEEN DEVALUED BECAUSE IT IS SO DANGEROUS. ONE MAN QUOTED A KOREAN PROVERB TO THE EFFECT THAT IF YOU TRY TO GET A RAT OUT OF A KIMCHI JAR BY THROWING A ROCK AT IT, YOU BREAK THE JAR. PEOPLE FEEL THAT A HUGE

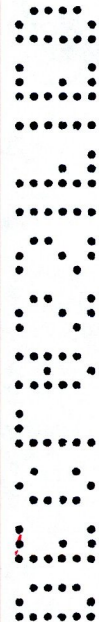
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MORAL DEBT IS OWED KWANGJU, AND THAT SOMEDAY THE DEBT MUST BE PAID, BUT THEY ARE NOT SURE WHEN OR HOW THAT CAN BE DONE. FOR NOW THEY ARE WILLING TO WAIT. THEY TALK OF THE GREAT CAPACITY OF KOREANS TO ENDURE HARDSHIPS AND PERSEVERE DURING DIFFICULT TIMES, AND SAY THAT NOW IT IS TIME TO ENDURE, NOT ACT.

5. PEOPLE ASSERT, HOWEVER, THAT THE RIGHT SPARK COULD SET OFF ANOTHER VIOLENT CONFRONTATION, AND IF THIS HAPPENS, IT COULD BE WORSE THAN THE MAY DISTURBANCES. IN KWANGJU AND MOKPO THERE IS A SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF BOLD MEN WHO MIGHT BE WILLING UNDER CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES TO RISK GRAVE PERSONAL DANGER TO LEAD ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY. HOWEVER, AT THE MOMENT THEY SHARE THE GENERAL DETERMINATION NOT TO STIR THINGS UP, AND LIKE MOST PEOPLE THEY ARE TRYING TO BE HOPEFUL: PERHAPS THE ELECTIONS THIS FALL WILL BE A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, AND MAYBE THE ECONOMY WILL IMPROVE.

6. THE VERY DETERMINATION TO SIT TIGHT AND ENDURE PRESENT DIFFICULTIES COULD, IF PROPER LEADERSHIP APPEARED, CHANGE QUICKLY AND BECOME A WILLINGNESS TO ENDURE THE CONSEQUENCES OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY. KOREANS SAY THAT THE MOST PROBABLE CAUSE OF MAJOR DISTURBANCES WOULD BE THE EXECUTION OR SERIOUS PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT OF KIM DAE JUNG (M-R: KIM TAE-CHUNG). WHILE PEOPLE IN OTHER REGIONS MIGHT EXPRESS AMBIVALENCE OR EVEN DISLIKE FOR KIM, IN CHOLLA, ALMOST WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THEY SUPPORT THE EX-PRESIDENTIAL



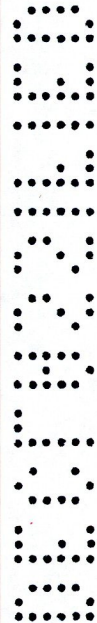
*MOKPO mentioned 1st time*

CANDIDATE. KIM'S PAST BEHAVIOR OR CHANCES OF ACTUALLY BECOMING PRESIDENT SEEM LESS IMPORTANT THAN HIS MEANING AS A SYMBOL OF CHOLLA AND DECENT GOVERNMENT.

7. A SHARP IRRITANT TO MANY PEOPLE ARE THE STRICTURES ON FREE SPEECH AND THE PRESS. THEY RESENT NOT BEING ABLE TO

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P 310835Z JUL 80  
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8108  
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIJING  
AMEMBASSY TOKYO  
SA CINCUNC KS  
CHJUSMAG SEUL KS  
COMUSKOREA SEOUL KS//BJ-IS

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TALK OPENLY AND LEARN WHAT OTHERS ARE THINKING, AND THEY REGARD THE SHALLOW REPORTING AND SIMPLISTIC EXHORTATIONS OF THE MEDIA AS INSULTING. IT MAY BE, TOO, THAT THE GOVERNMENT'S BRIEF RELAXATION OF MEDIA CONTROLS LAST WINTER HAS MADE THE PRESENT RESTRICTIONS ALL THE MORE GALLING. WORD DOES GET AROUND, HOWEVER, AND DESPITE THE RESTRICTIONS THERE IS A SURPRISING SIMILARITY IN WHAT PEOPLE HEAR AND THINK IN DIFFERENT PLACES. SIMILAR RUMORS ARE CURRENT IN BOTH KWANGJU AND MOKPO, SIMILAR CONVICTIONS AND SIMILAR CONCLUSIONS.

8. ONE WIDELY SHARED BELIEF IS THAT THE U.S. IS PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENED IN KWANGJU. OPINION VARIES AS TO THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE U.S. ACTUALLY APPROVED CHUN DOO-HWAN'S (MR. CHON TU-HWAN) HANDLING OF THE INCIDENT. EVERYONE SPoken TO BELIEVES THAT THE WORST ASPECTS OF THE KWANGJU DISTURBANCES COULD NOT HAVE OCCURRED WITHOUT AT LEAST THE ACQUIESCENCE OF THE U.S. AND, MORE GENERALLY, THAT WHATEVER EFFORTS THE U.S. IS MAKING TO CONTAIN AND GUIDE CHUN RE SO WISHY-WASHY THAT THEY CAN HAVE NO EFFECT.

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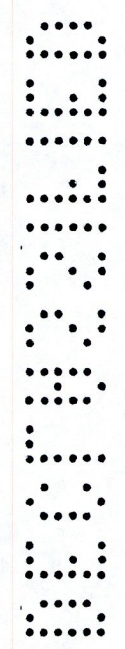
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AT WORK HERE IS A LONG-STANDING KOREAN CONVICTION--BREAKING DOWN SOMEWHAT IN RECENT YEARS, BUT STILL APPLICABLE--THAT THE U.S. IS SO DEEPLY INVOLVED IN KOREA AND SO POWERFUL THAT IT IS PERFORCE RESPONSIBLE FOR MAJOR HAPPENINGS. THIS CONVICTION LEADS KOREANS WHO OTHERWISE DISTRUST THE MEDIA TO ACCEPT AT FACE VALUE REPORTING THAT REFLECTS UNFAVORABLY ON THE U.S.

9. BUT PEOPLE RESERVE THEIR STRONGEST INVECTIVE FOR CHUN

*Koreans suspicion of US in Kwangju/Chun*

*typical US ruse -  
"they blame us for everything"*



DOO-HWAN. ~~THEY FLATLY REJECT ALLEGATIONS THAT COMMUNIST AGENTS WERE AT WORK IN KWANGJU AND HOLD CHUN HIMSELF RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENED THERE.~~ PEOPLE REGARD HIS DECISION TO SEND PARATROOPERS TO KWANGJU--TROOPS TRAINED ONLY FOR COMBAT, NOT TO CONTROL CIVIL DISTURBANCES--AS EVIDENCE THAT CHUN IS INCAPABLE OF MODERATE OR SENSIBLE LEADERSHIP. IN BOTH KWANGJU AND MOKPO PEOPLE LIKENED HIS METHODS TO THOSE OF THE NAZIS. IN MOKPO A MAN QUOTED AS FOLLOWS A POEM HE HEARD AND THAT HE THINKS WAS WRITTEN BY HAHM SOK-HUN: IN KOREA WHEN A MAN KILLS A SINGLE COW WE CALL HIM A BUTCHER; WHAT WORD CAN WE POSSIBLY FIND FOR THE MAN WHO KILLED HUNDREDS OF OUR PEOPLE IN KWANGJU? THIS POEM STIRRED THE FIVE OTHERS PRESENT TO BITTER DENUNCIATIONS OF CHUN.

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10. IN KWANGJU PEOPLE ASSERT THAT CHUN'S EXCESSES AND INADEQUACIES ENGENDERED SOMETHING AKIN TO NOSTALGIA FOR THE PARK ERA, EVEN AMONG THOSE WHO ONCE HAD ONLY CRITICISM FOR PARK: NOTHING LIKE KWANGJU EVER HAPPENED UNDER PARK, AND AT LEAST HE KNEW HOW TO RUN THE ECONOMY. THEY CLAIM THAT THE RECESSION IS WORSE IN CHOLLADO THAN ANYWHERE ELSE, AND THIS IS BECAUSE THE KWANGJU INCIDENT FRIGHTENED PEOPLE AWAY FROM ECONOMIC ACTIVITY. THUS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DISCONTENT JOIN, AND CHUN IS HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR CONFIDENTIAL

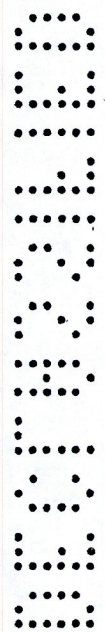
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BOTH.

11. ~~THE INTENSITY OF FEELING AGAINST CHUN IN CHOLLA HAS RISEN SO THAT IT NOW WEAKENS ENTHUSIASM FOR THE BASIC ORTHODOXY, ANTI-COMMUNISM.~~ NO ONE SAYS THAT THE THREAT FROM THE NORTH IS A FABRICATION; INDEED, ALL KOREANS AGREE THAT TO DENY THE THREAT BORDERS ON TREASON. BUT WHILE AFFIRMING THE THREAT IN A PERFUNCTORY WAY, IN THE NEXT BREATH MANY KOREANS SAY IT IS OVERSTATED AND COMPARE TODAY'S KOREA WITH VIETNAM BEFORE THIEU'S FALL. IN KWANGJU TODAY, PEOPLE ARE DISPIRITED AND UNABLE TO RAISE MUCH ENTHUSIASM FOR ANTI-COMMUNISM, PURIFICATION OR ANY OF THE OTHER PROGRAMS THE GOVERNMENT IS URGING ON THEM.

12. SURPRISINGLY, PEOPLE DON'T TALK MUCH ABOUT REGIONAL DISCRIMINATION. IT EXISTS, OF COURSE, AS A FEATURE ON THE LANDSCAPE, BUT IT DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE BEEN A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE KWANGJU INCIDENT. LEFT ALONE TO EXPLAIN THEIR OWN VIEW OF THE CAUSES OF THE INCIDENT, NONE OF THE PEOPLE SPOKEN TO BROUGHT UP DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHOLLADO. WHEN ASKED POINTEDLY WHETHER DISCRIMINATION WAS A FACTOR, SOME PEOPLE SAID NO, SOME SAID ONLY A MINOR FACTOR. THEY FEEL THAT THE GOVERNMENT PROPAGATED A REGIONALIST INTERPRETATION OF THE INCIDENT TO UNITE ALL OTHER PROVINCES WITH IT IN A COMMON VIEW, AND THEY SPECULATE THAT FOREIGN NEWSMEN OVERPLAYED THE REGIONALIST THEME BECAUSE IT IS SO

*regionalism not a factor in Kwangju*





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13. PEOPLE SAID THAT IN FACT REGIONAL ANTAGONISMS HAVE BEEN SUBSIDING IN RECENT YEARS, AND WHILE THE KWANGJU INCIDENT HAS FOR THE MOMENT FANNED THOSE ANTAGONISMS, IT WAS NOT CAUSED BY THEM. ONE MAN, TRYING TO PUT THE DISCUSSION BACK ON TRACK, POINTED OUT THAT REGIONAL ANTAGONISM EXISTED DURING THE PARK REGIME, BUT NO INCIDENT LIKE KWANGJU OCCURRED THEN; THE PROBLEM IS THE GOVERNMENT, HE SAID.

14. A FINAL WORD ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED IN MOKPO DURING THE STRIFE IN KWANGJU. NO TROOPS WERE DISPATCHED TO MOKPO AND NO CONFRONTATION OCCURRED. RALLIES IN FRONT OF THE TRAIN STATION AND ONE LONG MARCH WERE FAIRLY ORDERLY. AN ATTEMPT TO SET AFIRE THE LOCAL KCIA OFFICE WAS FOILED. ALTOGETHER SOME 30 PEOPLE WERE ARRESTED AND SEVERAL POLITICAL ACTIVISTS WENT INTO HIDING TO AVOID ARREST, INCLUDING THE OWNER OF A CHINESE APOTHECARY, WHO IS A LONGTIME SUPPORTER OF KIM DAE JUNG AND WHOSE SHOP REMAINS CONSPICUOUSLY CLOSED. THERE WAS LITTLE OR NO VIOLENCE. THE POLICE STOOD BACK. DURING THE MID-MAY DISTURBANCES, A LARGE

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BANNER WAS ERRECTED IN FRONT OF MOKPO TRAIN STATION THAT READ IN BOLD CHARACTERS, "CHUN DOO-HWAN, GET OUT\*" THE BANNER WAS PLACED NOT 100 YARDS AWAY FROM A POLICE STATION, BUT NO ONE MOVED TO TAKE IT DOWN. ITS DEFIANT MESSAGE REMAINED IN FULL VIEW FOR NEARLY A WEEK. MONJO

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