

# The Korean War, Anticommunism, and the Korean American Community<sup>1</sup>

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The Korean War (1950–1953) remains possibly the most traumatic collective experience for most Koreans, both on the peninsula and in the diaspora since 1945.<sup>2</sup> The war claimed close to three million civilian lives and destroyed half of Korea's industries and a third of all its homes. Moreover, the atrocities committed by both sides left Koreans with deep scars, as many who were accused of supporting the other side were imprisoned or summarily executed during the war.

The Armistice Agreement of 1953 was not a peace treaty signed by any of the governments involved in the war, but rather an agreement to suspend fighting. The Korean peninsula has since been engulfed in intense Cold War geopolitics. In the south, the war also overshadowed the thirty-five years of colonial occupation by Japan, the division of Korea, and the occupation by the United States as well as its continuing dominance in political and military affairs. It also conferred ideological legitimacy upon the south Korean state, which it had lacked prior to the war, as anticommunism became its primary state policy. The enmity toward and fear of north Korea that developed as a result of the war also contributed to the deeply internalized and quotidian quality of anticommunism in south Korea.

Until very recently, the unfinished Korean War and the deepening geopolitics of the Cold War also silenced those who lost their loved ones and those whose lives were irrevocably from

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<sup>2</sup> This is a conventional periodization of the Korean War, but given that there were numerous border skirmishes well before June 1950 and that there was no peace treaty signed, the year 1953 marks only the cessation of fighting, not the end of the war.

disrupted, preventing them from speaking freely about their own experiences. This silence pervaded the Korean American community as well, aggravated by anticommunism in the United States, the close alliance between the United States and south Korea, which shared intelligence based on the monitoring of Korean Americans, and the community's own internal censorship. In what follows, I discuss the emergence of anticommunism as a hegemonic social discourse in the trajectory of south Korean state formation. I then discuss the role of the National Security Law and the Anticommunist Law in silencing undesirable elements in society. I conclude with a brief remarks on the impact of anticommunism on the Korean American community.

### *Anticommunism as Hegemonic Discourse*

As traumatic as the war was, it did not necessarily turn south Koreans into vehement anticommunists in its immediate aftermath. In the 1956 presidential election, for example, over two million Koreans, of the nine million who cast votes, voted for the Progressive Party (*Chinbodang*) candidate Cho Pong-am. He had promulgated a “social democratic” platform that included peaceful reunification with north Korea.<sup>3</sup> However, the state continually mobilized individual experience of the war, which was hardened into a useful social memory that then served as an effective medium through which to consolidate society and to sustain a sense of fear and animosity toward north Korea.

One of the principal mechanisms through which the authoritarian regimes controlled and disciplined society was the indiscriminate application of the National Security Law (NSL) and the Anticommunist Law. First enacted in 1948 and revised several times since, the NSL mandated harsh punishments for “any person who has organized an association or group for the

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<sup>3</sup> Sō, *Cho Pong-am kwa 1950-yōndae*, vol. 1, 149.

purpose of . . . disturbing the state or who prepared or conspired to do so.”<sup>4</sup> The Anticommunist Law, promulgated soon after the military coup of 1961, was created to deal further with dissent and was followed by the revamping of the NSL in 1962. Intended to “strengthen the anti-communist posture . . . [and] block the activities of the communist organizations that endanger the national security,” this law mandated up to seven years of hard labor for “any person who has praised, encouraged, or sided with anti-state organizations or members thereof on foreign communist lines or benefited the same in any way through other means.”<sup>5</sup> In reality, both the NSL and Anticommunist Law were applied indiscriminately to those who criticized inequality in a capitalist economy, the lack of political freedom in south Korea, south Korea’s unequal relations with the United States, or even those who called for Korean reunification.

Beginning in the 1960s, as international détente and domestic tensions intensified, the south Korean state began to equate anticommunism with national security and public safety. The 1969 Nixon Doctrine—which called for each ally nation to be in charge of its own security—as well as Nixon’s 1972 visit to China made Koreans suspect that the United States would no longer provide military protection for south Korea. In the mid-1960s north Korea turned belligerent toward south Korea, blowing up a railroad line at the time of U.S. President Lyndon Johnson’s visit in 1966, sending armed commandos to the presidential residence (known as the Blue House) in an attempt to assassinate Park Chung Hee in January 1968, and sending again armed commandos to Samch’ŏk, in Gangwon Province later that year. Domestically, intellectuals, students, and workers vociferously opposed the Park regime. All of these developments led the state to declare national security as an absolute goal to be achieved at all costs; 1972 was designated “the year of all-out security” (*ch’ongnyok anbo*).

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Shaw, ed., *Human Rights in Korea*, 184.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Anticommunism, therefore, was directed not only toward the “real communist” north Korea and its followers, but even more toward domestic political opposition. North Korea’s close proximity to south Korea, the fratricidal Korean War, and the continuing confrontation between the two Koreas made anticommunism in south Korea a particularly virulent form of social control as well as an effective method of maintaining the state’s hegemonic power. South Korea’s anticommunist state relegated those who were critical of society to the category of the Other.

Anticommunism in south Korea has been promoted and sustained not only by the state but also by the conservative mass media, Christian, veterans’, and various civic organizations. These groups’ political sinew was demonstrated during the liberal government of Kim Dae Jung. In October 1998, one of the conservative monthly journals accused the well-known Professor Ch’oe Changjip of praising north Korea in his account of the Korean War and demanded that he be removed from his position as head of the Presidential Policy Planning Committee. Ch’oe was forced to resign by the combined forces of the conservative opposition political party, various associations of former military leaders, and veterans’ organizations.<sup>6</sup> More recently, conservative mass media and right-wing grassroots organizations accused Shin Eun-mi, the Korean American author of a bestselling travelogue of north Korea, of allegedly making “supportive comments” about north Korea in her book and in a series of public forums, which prompted the state to eventually deport her to the United States and barred her from entering south Korea for five years.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See Koryŏ Taehakgyo taehakwŏn chŏng’oegwa, “Ch’oe Chang-jip kyosu.”

<sup>7</sup> See Shin, “A Korean American Housewife Confronts South Korea’s National Security Law.”

### *Anticommunism: Historical Context*

A nation's concept of "the Other" is usually not a primordial or stable social category but rather is contested and reconfigured throughout its historical development. The communist as the Other in south Korea is a product of its specific colonial and postcolonial condition, as well as its political development. During the colonial period, Japanese authorities vilified communists as "criminals" and "sinners," as they did anyone opposing Japan at the time; in Manchukuo, a puppet government in Manchuria set up by the Japanese (1932-1945), bandits were commonly called communists.

Korean communists enjoyed widespread support among the Korean people, despite their brief existence as an organized party and factionalism, for their persistent resistance against Japanese. The onset of the cold war regime in Korea changed this attitude. Korea's independence from Japan came in the end not as a result of their own struggle but as a result of the end of World War II. The United States, anxious about the possible move of the Soviet Union—who was invited by Roosevelt to expel Japanese and whose troops had already moved in the northern Korea—to occupy the whole peninsula, divided the country into half, occupying the southern part and ruling it under a military government. The leftists, frustrated by political constraints not of their own making and believing that their sacrifices during the anticolonial struggle conferred on them a historical and moral mandate, pushed relentlessly for their own vision of a socialist Korea. The rightists, with little historical or moral claim to the nation's leadership, were equally adamant about their right to chart the future of Korea on their own terms. Despite efforts by those in the middle of the political spectrum (*chungdop'a*) to bring about a unified Korea, separate regimes in the south and north were established in 1948 with extensive backing from the United States and the USSR. In 1950, another effort to reunify the

country by force resulted in the Korean War.

The turning point for the public reception of leftists in the south came with their decision to support the agreement at the Moscow Conference of December 1945. Members of the Moscow Conference agreed to set up a provisional Korean government first before considering a four-power trusteeship of Korea.<sup>8</sup> In part through media manipulation on the part of the U.S. military government (1945-48) and rightist Korean elements, however, many Koreans came to believe that the agreement would establish a trusteeship in Korea and that the United States opposed the trusteeship (in fact, the United States had endorsed it) while the Soviet and the leftists, following the orders of the Soviet Union, supported it. Many Koreans could not accept the idea of foreign rule implied in the trusteeship, and they vehemently opposed it. The left, encouraged by the proposal for a provisional Korean government, declared its support for the “full text” of the agreement without clarifying its position on the issue of trusteeship, which it did not support.<sup>9</sup> Regardless, many Koreans in the south came to see communists as inveterate lackeys of Moscow, individuals with no concern for the nation’s future.<sup>10</sup>

Although internal division between the leftists and rightists accounted for much of the political mayhem in the immediate post-1945 period, U.S. policy in Korea was decisive in helping consolidate the power of rightists’ power to ascend, while eliminating that of the communists and leftists. Dictated by U.S. military and security interests in Asia, at the heart of U.S. policy in south Korea was “the containment of the spread of Soviet communism, the establishment of political stability, and the securing of Korean allies who would promote an

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<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of the Moscow Conference, see Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 1, 215-27.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 223; Pak, *Han’guk chŏnjaeng*, 92-96.

<sup>10</sup> Pak, *Han’guk chŏnjaeng*, 97.

American style democracy and capitalist development.”<sup>11</sup> In essence, the American ideals of freedom and democracy guiding Korean political development served, as Bruce Cumings succinctly points out, as “code words for anti-communism.”<sup>12</sup> The U.S. military government in Korea proved to be a highly effective proselytizer for anticommunism in postcolonial south Korea.<sup>13</sup> By the time the Republic of Korea was established in 1948, the revolutionary situation of the first few years after 1945 was brought completely under control. Leftist groups that had mounted a vigorous challenge to the regime were driven underground, and General Douglas MacArthur declared south Korea “an impregnable bulwark against all dissident elements.”<sup>14</sup>

In this heated cold-war environment, the variegated sociopolitical issues that defied easy categorization were reduced to a simplistic and volatile binary between anticommunism and pro-communism, as exemplified by the trusteeship case. Those individuals whose previous political allegiance and activities would have been a target for the post-1945 purge of pro-Japanese elements were given a new political life and identity as anticommunists. In this world of stark divisions between communism and anticommunism, communists, or anyone accused of being one, had become not only “antinational” but also an “impure element.” They were branded as “thieves, bandits, seditious, heretic, vampire, and evil spirits.”<sup>15</sup> Society was to dispose of these elements, “[j]ust as *chapkwi* [sundry evil spirits] are feared and exorcised as evil in the shamanic rituals.”<sup>16</sup> They were not only denied full citizenship, they were deemed to be less than human beings. Under the system of *yŏnjwaje*—punishing family members and relatives of those accused of a major crime such as *lèse-majesté*—the family members and relatives of an alleged

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<sup>11</sup> Kim, “Politics of Repression,” 20.

<sup>12</sup> Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 2, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Kim, *Pundan kwa Han’guk sahŏe*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Kim, “Politics of Repression,” 25.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Kim, *Pundan kwa Han’guk sahŏe*, 47, note 8.

<sup>16</sup> Kim, “Chronicle of Violence,” 290.

leftist were barred from employment as public servants and in corporations, entry into military academy, and travel abroad.

Throughout the postcolonial period, the elimination of perceived dissident elements in south Korea was conducted with a brutality and violence that was unparalleled even during the Japanese occupation. The “red hunt” in the south was carried out with added ferocity when Christians fleeing from the north joined in. Christians in north Korea had suffered severe persecution in the early stages of the north Korean regime, giving rise to their vehement anticommunism. The police also made frequent, indiscriminate arrests of those they claimed might be leftist. A *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter visiting Korea during the U.S. military government period noted in 1946 that “the victim was already damned as a Communist and Enemy [*sic*] of the State. To ‘prove’ their case, the police set about wringing a ‘confession’ from them.”<sup>17</sup>

The mass murder and rape of those considered leftists and dissenters were not isolated incidents in the immediate post-1945 period. The massacre of the Cheju people occurred two years before the Korean War, in 1948, and is now known as the Cheju Uprising. The combined forces of police and paramilitary groups, with the guidance of American military officers, killed more than ten percent of the island’s population. Soldiers belonging to the Sixth and Fourteenth Regiments and stationed in Yōsu and Sunch’ōn refused to participate in the suppression of the Cheju Uprising. Their rebellion led the state to round up the residents of these cities as collaborators.<sup>18</sup> Thousands were summarily executed and imprisoned; those who were left in prison were executed during the Korean War. Many of their family members were subsequently barred from employment and other social activities—one observer was led to comment, “It is no

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<sup>17</sup> Gayn, *Japan Diary*; quoted in Kim, “Politics of Repression,” 193.

<sup>18</sup> Cumings, *Origins of the Korean War*, vol. 2, 259-67.



wonder that Chŏlla Province is void of the talented.”<sup>19</sup>

The case of the National League of Guidance (*Kungmin podo yŏnmaeng*) again speaks to the south Korean regime’s brutal suppression of leftists. Organized by the state in 1949 to weed out remaining leftists, the league lured former leftists with the false promise that they would be forgiven their former political allegiances. As soon as the Korean War broke out, however, most of the league’s members were summarily executed; the whereabouts of their bodies became known only in the 1990s.<sup>20</sup> Another group of roughly 50,000 people was subjected to indiscriminate execution, torture, or various restrictions, all for their alleged cooperation with the north during its brief occupation of the south during the Korean War.<sup>21</sup>

#### *The Enemy Within and Without: Espionage Cases*

From the early 1960s onward, the south Korean state strengthened and amplified anticommunism by instituting anticommunist education. The central focus of anticommunist education was to instill in children enmity toward north Korea; there was little discussion about the history or main tenets of communism or discussion of why or what to oppose about communism. With the conciliatory U.S. policy toward the communist bloc and a series of north Korean armed incursions in the late 1960s that I have mentioned above, military training was introduced in high schools and universities in 1969 on the grounds that the military threat from north Korea demanded adequate preparation on the part of all south Korean youth. With the emergence of the Yusin system in 1972, anticommunist education became more systematic in its content and its emphasis on national security. School activities and performances, such as photo

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<sup>19</sup> Kim, “1948-nyŏn Yeosun ponggi,” 249.

<sup>20</sup> Han, “Kungmin Podo Yŏnmaeng.”

<sup>21</sup> Pak, “Chŏnjaeng puyŏkcha.”

exhibits, lecture series, speech contests, and essay contests to strengthen national defense, were held regularly during the Yusin period. Instructions on how to report north Korean spies to state authorities were part of the curriculum.<sup>22</sup>

As anticommunist education and the state security apparatuses prepared south Koreans to fight against the “enemy,” the real and presumed existence of the enemy was taken for granted. The enemy was not geographically specific or bound; it was ubiquitous and unrelenting. The enemy was not only north Korea but also, more broadly, anyone perceived to harbor a notion different from that of the south Korean state on how society should be changed. Those with dissenting views from the state were made into enemies of the state through legal measures such as the NSL and the Anticommunist Law. This discourse of enmity and the characterization of disparate dissenting elements as a unified, presumably pro-communist force against the state were effective ways to quash dissent and discipline society.

The existence of these enemies was performatively confirmed in the routing out of “espionage rings,” the exposure of which became the most important function of the KCIA (Korea Central Intelligence Agency) and which occurred periodically throughout the post-1945 period. I do not mean to suggest that all espionage cases were manufactured by the KCIA or to impute that the state’s operation of KCIA was not without some basis in logic. There certainly were and are north Korean spies operating in the south just as south Korea has also its spies in the north.

Regardless of the actual role of north Korea in these espionage cases, many of which were in fact underground vanguard organizations, what remains paramount is the general function of espionage cases in south Korea. The KCIA’s exposure—and manufacture—of

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<sup>22</sup> Han, “Yusin cheje pan’gong kyoyuk,” 334-35.

espionage incidents served as the regime's routine mechanism through which the dual function of warning the public about the danger of dissent and eliminating dissenting social forces was fulfilled. Most espionage cases were announced after major political events in south Korea, such as presidential elections or particularly violent student or worker demonstrations. In the 1960s alone, there were at least three major espionage cases involving intellectuals, university students, and "progressive forces" (*hyöksin'gye*)—individuals who had participated in various leftist organizations in the immediate post-1945 era and in the social movements of the 1960s.

The first case was announced on August 14, 1964, when south Korean society was still gripped by the nationwide protest against the Normalization Treaty with Japan. The KCIA announced the so-called "Inmin Hyöngmyöngdang [People's Revolutionary Party] Incident"; university professors, journalists, and students were alleged to have directed the student protest to bring about socialist revolution under the direction of north Korea. Many of the implicated were well known, such as the noted scholar of Chinese literature Im Ch'angsun, economist Kim Pyöngt'ae, journalist Chöng Toyöng, and other individuals whose names were familiar to the intellectual community in Korea.<sup>23</sup> Most were also active in the protest against the Normalization Treaty.

This espionage case was clearly the Park Chung Hee regime's warning to both south Korean progressive forces and north Korea; the progressive forces had resurfaced again with the growing protest against the Normalization Treaty. All of the accused vehemently denied the existence of any vanguard organization, let alone claims that they were north Korean agents. Indeed, there was no conclusive evidence that these individuals had any "organizational or continuous" contact with the North. Regardless, the majority of the forty-seven arrested were

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<sup>23</sup> Pak and Kim, *1960-yöndaee üi sahoe undong*, 215.

severely tortured, leading some prosecutors to resign in protest, a rare act of courage for the judiciary that had been generally regarded as a handmaiden to the regime.<sup>24</sup>

The second major espionage case of the 1960s was announced in July 1967, soon after the presidential and general elections—elections which were widely regarded as rigged and were followed by widespread protests. The KCIA accused a group of Koreans residing in Europe (hence the name *Tongbaeknim* [East Berlin Incident]), including Yun I-sang, an internationally renowned composer, of spying for north Korea. Altogether, fifteen university professors, a medical doctor, artists, and civil servants were said to have frequented the north Korean Embassy in East Berlin, some visiting Pyongyang and receiving secret training to carry out spy activities.<sup>25</sup>

A few days later, the KCIA announced another espionage case involving faculty members at major universities who were studying or had previously studied in Europe, who were reputed to have been in contact with the East Berlin group. According to the KCIA, Hwang Sŏngmo, a well-known professor of sociology at Seoul National University, and a number of other university professors had formed an extracurricular circle in their departments in order to “establish the base for socialist revolution,” to “instill seditious ideas” among students, and to instigate various protests aiming to destabilize society, thereby aiding north Korea.<sup>26</sup>

In 1974, in the midst of the intense protest against Park Chung Hee’s Yusin measures that did away with democratic rules and procedures,<sup>27</sup> the regime accused a group of individuals of

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<sup>24</sup> Yi, *Haebanghu Han’guk haksae undongsa*, 247.

<sup>25</sup> *Kong’an sakŏn kirok*, 17; Yi, *Haebanghu Han’guk haksae undongsa*, 255-56.

<sup>26</sup> *Kong’an sakŏn kirok*, 24-58.

<sup>27</sup> On October 1972, Park declared martial law and the Yusin Constitution and a series of measures, which gave him the power “to appoint one-third of the National Assembly; to dissolve the National Assembly at will; to appoint all judges; and to appoint all members of the constitutional committee, which determined whether laws passed by the National Assembly were constitutional.” These measures also allowed Park to take whatever emergency measures might be needed, whenever “the national security or the public safety and order is seriously

organizing the second People's Revolutionary Party, and eight of the accused were executed only eighteen hours after the Supreme Court's decision to dismiss the final appeal.<sup>28</sup> Some thirty years later, the first and second cases of the People's Revolutionary Party were found to have been fabricated by the KCIA in order to suppress the anti-Yusin movement, according to the "Committee to advance [Korean society] through examining the truth about the past incidents in which the National Intelligence Service (NIS [formerly KCIA]) was involved; hereafter Committee of NIS" (Kukka chŏngbowŏn kwagŏ sakŏn chinsil kyumyŏng ŭl t'onghan palchŏn wiwŏnhoe").<sup>29</sup>

The case involving Koreans in Europe was also aimed at routing out pro-democracy movements abroad that were gaining momentum at the time.<sup>30</sup> In the final count, 194 intellectuals were said to have been involved in these spy rings. Two received death sentences and the rest received prison terms from three and a half years to life.<sup>31</sup> The composer Yun I-sang was kidnapped by the KCIA in 1967 from his home in West Berlin (where he had lived since 1957), taken to Seoul, and sentenced to life imprisonment. Released in 1969 after a worldwide petition led by renowned musicians, he returned to West Berlin. He died in 1995 without ever fulfilling his wish to return to his homeland.

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threatened or anticipated to be threatened." Hart-Landsberg, *Rush to Development*, 186.

<sup>28</sup> *Kong'an sakŏn kirok*, 102.

<sup>29</sup> See Yi and Pak, "Inhyŏktang, Minch'ŏnghanngnyŏn sakŏn ūn chojak." The committee was created by the NIS in part to gain public trust through investigating incidents its predecessor was involved in, and it was composed of civilians and NIS officials.

<sup>30</sup> Koreans residing in Europe, Japan, and North America began to form pro-democracy groups in the early 1970s. Most of these groups, however, were far from "revolutionary"—they mostly discussed Korea-related issues, published newspapers, and demonstrated occasionally in front of Korean consulate buildings. A few individuals with family members and friends in the North had visited North Korea via East Germany, giving the south Korean regime justification to brand them as north Korean agents.

<sup>31</sup> *Kongan sakŏn kirok*, 19, 59. On January 26, 2006, the previously mentioned "Committee of NIS" concluded that while some of the accused had visited north Korea and had received money, they had not engaged in espionage activities.

As the East Berlin Incident indicates, Korean communities abroad were not immune to the threat of red-baiting and persecution, under the guise of national security, by the south Korean state. Koreans in Japan were the diasporic community most hard hit by the accusation of espionage—throughout the 1970s and 1980s, approximately two hundred *zainichi* Koreans were charged with violation of the NSL and imprisoned in south Korea.<sup>32</sup> The most well-known case involved the Sō brothers, Sō Sūng and Sō Chun-sik. They were Korean residents in Japan (*zainichi kankoku chosengin*), and their case was emblematic not only of their marginalized place as a minority in Japan but also of the insidious impact of the division of Korea.<sup>33</sup> In no other country outside Korea were the everyday lives of Koreans so deeply affected by the legacy of division. Indeed, the Korean community in Japan has been divided into two groups since 1945: one group that identified politically and socially with north Korea (*Ch'ongnyŏn*, or the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan) and one with south Korea (*Mindan*, or the Korean Residents Association in Japan).

It is important to point out here that the decision on the part of some *zainichi* Koreans to identify with *Ch'ongnyŏn* has historically had more to do with the intensity of Japanese discrimination against Koreans than with where they originally hailed from. *Ch'ongnyŏn*, from its very inception in the immediate post-1945 period, had advocated a nonassimilationist policy and, through its various institutions and programs such as Korean schools and its own business ventures, has made it possible for *zainichi* Koreans to live with some semblance of cultural pride and political identity. Furthermore, many became *Ch'ongnyŏn* members as they were inspired by the north Korean leadership's erstwhile anti-colonial resistance, its contemporary

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<sup>32</sup> Mun, "Uri, Taehanmin'guk ūi yaman," 379.

<sup>33</sup> I use "*zainichi* Koreans," meaning "south and north Korean residents in Japan," to refer to both groups of Koreans in Japan (referring to their legal status as permanent residents), bearing in mind that Koreans in Japan use various terms.

decolonizing effort in the context of the bipolar allegiances required throughout the Cold War, among others.

The status of north Korea as an enemy of south Korea also applied, in broad-brushed fashion, to the members of *Ch'ongnyŏn*, making them *persona non grata* in south Korea until the early 1990s. In this regard, throughout the Cold War, members of *Ch'ongnyŏn* were also unable to easily reunify with their family members in the south. Not surprisingly, most Koreans from Japan visiting south Korea until the end of the 1980s were *Mindan* members. Those *zainichi* Koreans who wanted to study in South Korea faced the prospect of grueling ideological screening. Only after undergoing “special education” were these Koreans eligible to attend regular schools in south Korea.

Once in the south, many *zainichi* Koreans found it difficult to adjust to the political repression and the accompanying self-censorship of intellectuals in Korea. Even *Mindan* members grew up in an atmosphere relatively tolerant of leftist perspectives insofar as half of the Korean community in Japan were members of *Ch'ongnyŏn* and the Communist Party maintains both legal standing and a sizable minority membership in Japan. Some had visited north Korea before coming to south Korea, as in the case of the Sŏ Brothers. Sŏ Sŏng and Sŏ Chun-sik were *Mindan* Koreans studying at Seoul National University when both were arrested by the KCIA in 1971. They were charged with violations of the NSL and the Anticommunist Law on the grounds that they instigated student protest against the government. Their other “crime” was a visit to north Korea.<sup>34</sup> As Sŏ Chun-sik wrote in his memoir, his price for a sojourn of eight days in north Korea was seventeen years in prison, averaging a two-year prison term for each day

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<sup>34</sup> See also Suh, *Unbroken Spirits*.

spent in north Korea.<sup>35</sup>

In his memoir, Sō wondered if it would ever be possible for the south Korean state authorities to understand the stages of his painful journey; as a second-generation *zainichi* Korean, Sō had spent his high school years longing to be in his homeland, Korea. In ninth grade, after prolonged agony over his identity, he decided to affirm his identity as Korean openly in a school-wide speech contest. He then changed his name from Fukuda to Sō (until 1985 the naturalization process in Japan required adopting a Yamato name) and at the age of nineteen, he went to south Korea where he began to study the Korean language at Seoul National University.

Coming from relative material comfort in Japan and long wishing to be with his fellow Koreans, Sō was shocked to see so many beggars, prostitutes, young children laboring as paperboys, shoeshine boys, and gum sellers, not to mention the ubiquitous English-lettered billboards and advertisements in Seoul. His days in Korea were filled with shock, anger, and pain at the “misery and suffering” of his fellow Koreans. His intellectual predilection for “social scientific analysis,” combined with his search for “true human liberation,” led him to socialist and Marxist ideas. To the south Korean authorities who repeatedly denied his release for ten years, even after he had served his original sentence of seven years, he was simply too “dangerous to society,” for he “still believed in the superiority of socialism.”

The espionage cases involving *zainichi* Koreans were especially risky for south Korean dissidents or human rights groups to get involved with, as they could easily be branded as pro-north Korea or, even worse, as spies, and the two brothers languished in prisons for nearly twenty years each, with little support from Korean activists. The older brother, Sō Sūng, suffered serious burns as a result of a suicide attempt in prison, and the younger brother, Sō

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<sup>35</sup> Citations in this and the following paragraphs are drawn from Sō, *Na'ii chujang*, 225-40.



Chun-sik, spent ten more years in prison under the Public Security Law (PSL), after having served his original sentence of seven years.<sup>36</sup>

While the persecution of the Sō brothers was the most well-known and possibly most severe case among those involving *zainichi* Koreans, there were numerous espionage cases involving *zainichi* Koreans and south Koreans visiting Japan. In 1974, a south Korean novelist's chance meeting with *zainichi* Koreans was turned into a matter of espionage by the KCIA.<sup>37</sup> As the former human rights lawyer (and current mayor of Seoul) Pak Wōn-sun remarked, any *zainichi* Korean traveling to south Korea was a potential candidate for a KCIA-manufactured espionage case in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>38</sup> Out of necessity, communities of the Korean diaspora had to be extremely cautious about any unintended link with north Korea.

#### *Anticommunism and Korean American Community*

The geopolitics of the continuing Cold War and the unfinished Korean War have transmitted south Korean society's longstanding anxiety, fear, and distrust of north Korea; its normative discourse of anticommunism; and its binary logic of "us" and "them" to communities throughout the Korean diaspora. In the United States, the politics of the Korean American community have been particularly vulnerable to Cold War logic, given how U.S.–South Korea relations are underpinned by U.S. military dominance in Asia and the explicit anticommunism of

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<sup>36</sup> The PSL was created in 1975 to monitor and to detain "preventively" those who had refused to "convert" by denouncing communism or those who had been released without conversion due to the expiration of their sentences. Sō Sūng was first sentenced to death. His sentence was reduced to life and then to twenty years. For more than seventeen of those twenty years, Sō Sūng was held in isolation with limited facilities and restricted access to reading and writing materials. He was released in 1990. Sō Chun-sik was released in 1988.

<sup>37</sup> Im, "74-nyōn mun'in kanch'ōptan sakōn."

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Mun, "Uri, Taehanmin'guk ūi yaman," 379.

U.S. immigration policy, among others.<sup>39</sup>

Surveillance of Koreans and Korean Americans in the United States, both by the south Korean and U.S. governments, has also added another layer of complexity to the politics of the Korean American community. In the 1950s in Los Angeles, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) collaborated with the south Korean state by deporting a number of Korean Americans who were critical—mostly in the pages of their bilingual newspaper called the *Korean Independent*—of Syngman Rhee, the U.S. occupation of Korea, and U.S. intervention in the Korean War.<sup>40</sup> The interpenetration of the U.S and south Korean intelligence apparatuses was again demonstrated by the Western Illinois Campus Spy Ring of 1985, which involved two Korean Americans and three students from Korea who came to the United States between 1982 and 1983 to pursue their graduate degrees at Western Illinois University. During their stays in the United States, Kim Söng-man and Yang Tong-hwa, both majoring in political science, were said to have read widely about the political system of north Korea, met with north Korean officials in Hungary and East Berlin, received political indoctrination and instructions on how to engage in antigovernment activities, and passed on information about the south Korean student movement to the north Koreans. In fact, what they had done was show a documentary about the Kwangju Uprising on campus. All three south Korean international students were arrested and severely tortured. Kim Söng-man and Yang Tong-hwa were sentenced to death, and Hwang T'ae-gwön was sentenced to life in prison.<sup>41</sup> Because of their U.S. citizenship status, Lee Chang-sin and Sö Chöng-gyun were spared imprisonment and torture, but their names were plastered over all the Korean-language newspapers in the United States.

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<sup>39</sup> On U.S. anticommunist immigration policy in the post-1945 era, see, among others, Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 414–416.

<sup>40</sup> Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun*, 455.

<sup>41</sup> See Minjuhwa Silch'ön Kajok Undong Hyöbühoe, ed., *10-tae chojik sakön*, 51–68.

The close collaboration between the U.S. and south Korean governments in this case was revealed by a former FBI agent, Jack Ryan, who was ordered to conduct a background check on the accused after they had already been arrested. He noted that the background check was carried out “as part of the foreign policy of south Korea, which is also part of [U.S.] foreign policy.”<sup>42</sup> It was also based on the assumption that their “espionage activities” might have involved activities harmful to U.S. interests, as presumably the three were working for north Korea, an “enemy” of the United States.<sup>43</sup> Ryan also notes that the U.S. government allowed the government of south Korea to plant security agents—in this case an army major in the guise of a graduate student—in American universities to monitor any dissent among Korean students.<sup>44</sup>

Just as in south Korea, individuals who were active in the democratization movements of Korea were arrested as spies. The targeted head of a spy ring, Sŏ Chŏng-gyun, a member of the Korean American community in New York City, was also active in the fight for democracy in South Korea and for Korean reunification. He published the *Newsletter of Diasporic Koreans* (*Haeoe Hanminbo*) from 1973 until 1985 and edited the monthly publication of the North American Council for Reunification of the Motherland (*Pukmiju choguk t’ongil hyŏphoe*) from 1987 on.<sup>45</sup>

Unlike *zainichi* Koreans in Japan, many Korean Americans are originally from the

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<sup>42</sup> Engleman, “Agent of Change: Jack Ryan's Odyssey From the FBI to the Peace Movement.”

<sup>43</sup> Kang Un-ji, “Kumi yuhaksaeng kanch’ŏptan sakŏn’ susahan chŏn FBI yowŏn, Jack Ryan Chŭng’ŏn.” The Korean magazine that interviewed Jack Ryan in early 2001 also relays that Prof. Jae-hyŏn Lee, a former south Korean diplomat who defected to the United States in 1973, suggested at the time that the south Korean government probably requested the FBI to conduct the background check. It was his opinion that the background check would be used to justify the harsh sentencing of the students, as there was increasing publicity surrounding the case, with the president of the university and several members of the Senate demanding their release and commutation of their death sentences.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Yi, “Chaemi ŏllonin Sŏ Chŏng-gyun ssi pyŏlse.”

northern part of the peninsula and have family and relatives in the north. There is lingering fear and weariness that that by unwittingly mentioning north Korea in a positive light, they might provoke the suspicion and wrath of the community or even the south Korean regime; likewise, they worry that any overt or inadvertent negative remarks about north Korea might endanger family members and relatives who still remain in the north. Until very recently those who have visited north Korea to look for family members or relatives have more often than not been branded as “pro–north Korea” and shunned by the community. The exact number of those who have visited north Korea is not available, nor are their experiences typically aired in public.<sup>46</sup> Once labeled a communist or a north Korean agent, those so accused have had little meaningful recourse, including clearing their name in court, to regain their reputation and standing in the community. Instead, the accused are deemed dangerous and therefore to be avoided at all costs, and they bear the lingering consequences of the unresolved Korean War.

The present-day Korean American community is still not free from the grip of the unfinished Korean War and the anticommunism of the south Korean state. This has been demonstrated most recently in the case of Shin Eun-mi. But it would be a grave mistake to characterize the community as seized only by Cold War fear. There have been many individuals and groups who have clearly and forcefully articulated the need to overcome the division and to bring about peaceful reconciliation of the two Koreas, and the current Legacy project is a contribution to these ongoing efforts.

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<sup>46</sup> One of the few notable exceptions is JT Takagi and Hye Jung Park’s *North Korea: Beyond the DMZ* (A Third World Newsreel Production, 2003), a documentary about a Korean American woman’s visit to north Korea on a search for relatives.

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