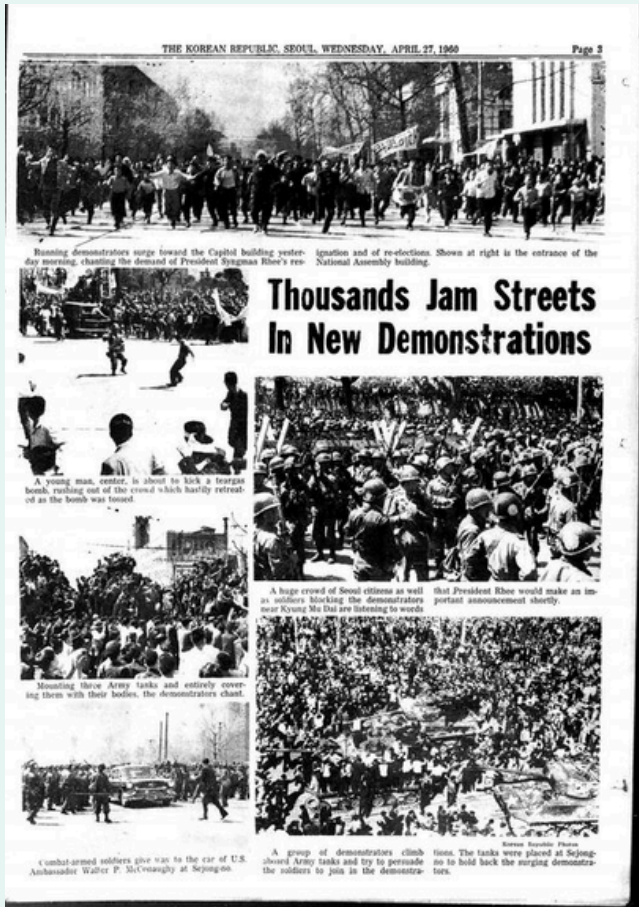


MESSICK'S KOREAN CULTURE LESSONS

Lesson #8

POWER OF STUDENTS

JUNE 19, 2024



MESSICK'S KOREAN CULTURE LESSON #8: MODERN SURVIVORS OF TERRIBLE HARDSHIP AND THE POWER OF STUDENTS

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It is important to realize that the hardships faced in Korea are not a thing of the distant past, they are experiences that many currently living have survived and have lost loved ones to. Even for events that happened earlier, reverberations are still felt across generations. When Japan annexed Korean in 1910, it was a source of great shame.

Many Koreans still hold resentment towards Japan to this day. The Korean War took place from 1950 to 1953. This was a war stemming from the occupied ideology of the Soviet Russian in North Korea and the capitalist ideology occupied by the United States in South Korea. When North Korea invaded South Korea with the backing of resources from the Soviet Union, the United States joined South Korea in pushing them back. North and South Korea fought a bloody war for three years that resulted in the loss of millions of lives. In July of 1953, an armistice ended the Korean War. The North and South continue with their respective authoritarian and democratic ideologies to this day, so their differences run deep. Following the war, South Korea was poor and had few resources, but they received aid from the United States. Their government was corrupt despite a desire for democracy that was often met with gunfire. After everything Koreans have gone through, there is now no compromise when it comes to maintaining democratic values, and when citizens feel that they are being wronged, so it is not uncommon for protests to get violent. Even student protests have been known to lock down respective universities and the university president's office, or in some cases, even major government offices. The April 19th, 1960 revolution toppled the government, and democratic elections were held. Students have been known to have a powerful voice in Korea, and one prominent example of this is when students rose up against the South Korean government for the rigged Vice Presidential elections in 1960.

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50,000 students from thirty different colleges and high schools stormed through police towards major government buildings. This was called the April Revolution. Police opened fire on students but they pushed forward anyway, resulting in the CIA evacuating President Syngman Rhee who would live the rest of his life in exile in Hawaii.

A coup d'état happened in May of 1961 that returned South Korea to a dictatorship under Park Chung Hee. The dictatorship continued for 18 years until Park Chung Hee was assassinated. There were some positives to this era, like momentum beginning towards economic development alongside a successful 'can do' attitude campaign that caught on with the people. Now Park Chung Hee is simultaneously seen as a major contributor to Korean economic development but also an individual that silenced calls for democracy and basic human rights by force.

Similar movements by students continued the lineage of protest and revolution. In 1980, the Gwangju Uprising took place in response to the installation of military dictator Chun Doo-Hwan following a rigged election and the implementation of martial law. Chun closed all universities and suppressed the press. The uprising began when university students demonstrated against martial law and then they were fired upon, raped, tortured sexually, and beaten (often to death) by the South Korean military. The resulting massacre is said to have resulted in between 1,000 and 2,300 deaths. Citizens raided nearby

armories and police stations and took up arms against the army. Students operated an underground press at this time to provide anti-authoritarian, pro-democracy rhetoric. The student generation of the 1980s played a pivotal role in the democratization of South Korea. After violent protests and student protesters flooded the streets daily, the military regime announced in June of 1987 that the next election would follow a true democratic process. This announcement caused all aspects of Korean life, including labor unions, to similarly follow suit and rise up against the government. Democracy had found its roots and was growing at a rapid pace. This is the path that South Korea continues today. It's important to note that many living generations of Koreans grew up with poverty, hunger, and are survivors of terrible loss, war, trauma, and violence. They experienced authoritarianism through firsthand experience. The massacres of family members, loved ones, and neighbors were not long ago. Older generations are those that have had their hopes crushed time and time again, and they lost family members and friends as a result. Younger generations grew up in a democracy after the industrial revolution and so they do not know suffering from poverty and hunger that their parents knew. Korean youth are less extreme and drastic than their parents because they didn't need to be to survive. It is startling the differences in experiences between just a few generations of Korea due to how rapidly the country experienced economic growth and drastic changes in democratization.