

**Social-Cultural Changes in South Korea since 1991:
An American View**

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Introduction

You can take the Korean out of Korea, but you cannot take Korea out of the Korean. This saying implies that experts on Korean affairs with Korean ethnicity, regardless of their citizenship, regardless of how many generations ago their families immigrated to other countries, may evaluate situations through Korean eyes and be biased towards traditional Korean points of view. Even though an increasing number of non-Koreans are becoming involved in the study of Korean affairs, which is a good sign for global awareness of the importance of Korea in world affairs, these individuals, of necessity, spend limited time in Korea and interact mostly with other professionals with similar interests and ideas. For these reasons, the author, who has lived and worked continuously in Korea since 1982, may be able to describe and discuss changes in Korean society as seen through non-Korean eyes.

The author first arrived in Korea in 1982 as a military officer with responsibility for managing military cooperative research and development programs between the Republic of Korea and the United States of America and the scientist/engineer exchange program. He continued in that position until he retired in August 1984, after which he became a member of the faculty at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

The author's observations and comments are based heavily on discussions over the years with students during classes such as debate and current affairs, on articles in *The Korea Times*, an English language newspaper published in Korea, on conversations with friends and colleagues, and on personal experiences. Since non-Koreans living in Korea tend to be sensitive to situations that have an adverse impact on them and ignore situations that don't adversely affect them, care has been taken to ensure that this article discussed changes in Korean society in a positive way rather than present a list of grievances. Although the title of this article indicates that it will address social and cultural changes, it is difficult to address such changes in a vacuum devoid of any reference to the political and economic climate, so such matters will

be included. In general, this paper will present observations and make comments concerning Korean family life, divorce, sexual attitudes, homosexuality, education, regional differences, attitudes toward North Korea, philanthropy, and racism. Some comments on politics and the economy will also be given.

Finally, the intent of these comments and observations is to provide information from a different perspective and possibly to instigate discussion and additional study. Along these lines, the author, where possible, will discuss perceived relationships between the Korean political and economic scene and the observed social-cultural changes. The author will also discuss the ways in which those observed changes might affect Korea's role in the international arena, with particular emphasis on the future of the Republic of Korea – United States of America (ROK – US) defense alliance, diplomatic relations between North and South Korea, and reunification with North Korea.

Korean Society and Culture: Observations and Discussion

A. Korean Family Life

Over the last decade, vast changes have occurred in the way young Koreans view family life. In many ways, the changes being seen in Korea mirror those that occurred in the United States in the late 1960's and early 1970's, but they are happening faster. The reasons for the changes also seem to be the same, a movement away from an extended family to a nuclear family, an increased awareness of women's rights, and the economy. Discussions with students indicate that the vast majority of women want a career and that they resent the idea of being forced to resign from their positions after having a baby. These women also point out that it is now almost impossible in Korea, as it is in the United States, for middle-class families to live on only the husband's income. Although a few women still value the traditional extended family and want to have many children and to live with their husbands' families, others are trying to compromise with tradition by seeking careers, such as free-lance translators, tutors, and music teachers, that will allow them to work from home. Although the percentage of men valuing the traditional way of life is much higher than that of the women (about double based on the author's observations and conversations with students), over the last two years such men have been rapidly decreasing in number. It is not clear whether this is due to men changing their outlooks on female roles in society or to

their being forced to accept a more feminist viewpoint by women who refuse to date conservative men or to consider them as candidates for marriage.

As to the extended family, many young Koreans no longer feel any responsibility to take care of their parents by having them live in the same households. The main reasons are conflicts between the wife and the mother-in-law and a reluctance to follow tradition. For example, many young families dislike maintaining silence at the dinner table simply because they are in the presence of older family members. They look forward to having family discussions over dinner as way to relax. In the past, many husbands went out and drank with their colleagues after work as a way to relax. Now, more and more husbands, though still not a large number, are going home after work to relax with their families. Many wives also feel that the in-laws should carry their share of the family chores while the in-laws, especially the mother-in-law, feel that they do not have to do so. In fact, many families view the parents-in-law as babysitters or daycare providers who will make it easier for the wife to have a full-time job. Another factor that may be affecting this change is the national pension system. The expansion of this system to include more and more workers is clouding the fact that many older Koreans never had the opportunity to participate in a pension plan and that Korea has no safety net for senior citizens.

These changes in family life have had many ramifications. First, the divorce rate in Korea has increased rapidly over the last decade, from about 1 per 1,000 people in the early 1990's to 3.5 per 1,000 people in 2003. This is larger than the rates in the European Union and Japan, but lower than the rate in the United States. In other terms, 304,900 marriages took place in 2003 while 167,100 divorces were granted, for a divorce-to-marriage ratio of almost 55%.¹ This trend has been attributed to an increase in the status of women, as many women now have jobs and independent sources of income, so they are less likely to stay with a husband in a situation that they consider unacceptable. However, there are indications of a more pervasive reason, increased awareness of social equality, as seen in the number of older women with neither jobs nor independent sources of income who refuse to continue in intolerable relationships. After they have fulfilled their familial obligations, i.e., after their children are grown and have completed their education, they seek divorce, the typical reasons being mental and physical

abuse. Mental abuse refers to the husband's forcing a wife to run the household on a fixed allowance or the husband spending his free time drinking with his colleagues and socializing with younger women. Although Korean family law makes it illegal for a husband to have sexual relations with a woman other than his wife, this law has rarely been invoked. Even today, women are seeking divorce rather than going to the police with complaints under the provisions of that law. Even though, for the past several years, Korea has had a law prohibiting domestic violence, public incidents of domestic physical abuse occur frequently, although on a diminishing basis, and are still tolerated by the police, who do not want to interfere in what they consider to be a family affair. Finally, a decrease in the stature of the Korean husband since the economic crisis of 1997, which caused widespread unemployment, undermined the husband's position as the primary breadwinner in the family, and placed a greater burden on the wife, has made a significant contribution to the divorce statistics.

A second ramification is the decreased birth rate, which is due to women wanting their own careers, few, but an increasing number of, husbands wanting to take responsibility for family chores and child rearing, and the slow economy. In 2002, the fertility rate of Korean women, 1.17 births per woman, was lower than the fertility rates in the United States (2.06), Japan (1.32), and most European countries. This declining fertility rate coupled with the increased aging of the Korean population, with 14% of the population projected to be over the age of 65 by the year 2019, do not bode well for Korean society and the Korean economy. First, there will be fewer younger members of society to take care of or to contribute financially to the care of, via social programs similar to Social Security in the United States, the older members of the population. Thus, the Korean government needs to consider providing some kind of future safety net for its senior citizens. The national pension programs, which were instituted several years ago, already show signs of financial problems, as is the case in the United States, with too little revenue being collected to cover the projected monetary outflow. Second, a projected shortage of labor will lead to increased reliance on imported labor and/or outsourcing of jobs to countries with an excess supply of labor. The Korean government is now considering incentives to increase the fertility rate; however, conversations with female students indicate that all

the mentioned incentives are insufficient to cause them to consider having more children.²

Although there have been several changes in the family registry system over the last decade, younger Korean females are almost unanimously opposed to that system. Their main reason is that the system can be used to discriminate against women and to restrict women's rights. For example, a copy of the family register is required for employment, and because it shows marital status (single, married, widowed, or divorced), it can be used to force married women to resign from their jobs and to deny educational and other opportunities outside the home to married and divorced women. Other less important objections include the fact that the system gives preferences to men and that a young male baby, instead of an adult wife, can become the family head if the father dies. The author foresees continued drastic changes in, and possible abolition of, this system, with more and more women combining family with a career. This will alter the makeup of the Korean workplace and, in the long term, should have a significant and beneficial impact on Korea society as more and more women bring their talents to bear on politics and the economy.

Finally, Korean attitudes toward adoption, both male and female attitudes, are almost universally negative, even among the more liberal-minded college students. It seems that "blood is thicker than water" is still an appropriate adage for Korea. When the author pressed his students with arguments in favor of adoption, they remained adamantly opposed to it. They seemed to have an inherent resentment to giving their love, labor, and hard-earned assets to someone not of the same blood. This attitude might be indirectly related to another observation, the lack of philanthropy in Korean society. Many business tycoons owe their success to favorable conditions presented to them by the Korean government; for example, loans at very favorable interest rates during the 1970's and 1980's when the average consumer could expect very little credit. In essence, the tycoons were able to use the average citizen's savings at a very little low interest rate to build their empires. However, these tycoons today feel little or no obligation to return part of their wealth to the citizens from whence it came, and although it is common in many countries for many businesses and business leaders to make large donations to educational institutions, this is not the case in Korea. Instead, schemes to circumvent gift and inheritance tax laws to pass large sums of

money to family members are frequently reported in Korean newspapers. In addition, even though a college education is one of the keys to success in Korea, colleges find it difficult to raise funds by appealing to alumni for contributions, a common practice in the United States and a source of significant income. A significant sign of change in this respect occurred recently when a researcher, Kim Dong-won, at the Korean Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST), donated his inheritance of 5 billion won to the institute, 4 billion won to be used for scholarships to endow 20 million won each to 10 KAIST students per year and one billion to be used to invite illustrious scholars to the institute. Lee Chang-moon, chairman of the US-based venture company Ambex, also recently donated 2 billion won to the institute.³

B. Sexuality

Among today's Korean students, the attitude toward sex and pre-marital sex is very different from that of just five years ago. In debate and current affairs classes, the author's students openly talk about sexual issues, including pre-marital sex. The students are almost unanimously in favor of living together before marriage, yet they readily admit that they would never let their parents find out. The main reason for this viewpoint is the increasing divorce rate. Most student feel that living with a potential mate will increase the probably of a successful marriage by allowing the couple to find out more about the intimate lives of their partners and separating, if necessary, before a disastrous marriage. In addition, students see nothing wrong in using sex as an expression of love.

Female students are also exerting more rights in sexual relations. A common point of dissension in the author's debate and current affairs classes is male reluctance to use a condom. The female students feel that they shoulder sole responsibility for birth control and suffer the most from social condemnation in the case of unwanted pregnancies. More and more female students are demanding that males take equal responsibility for birth control and are looking toward abortion as an easy solution to an unwanted pregnancy. Although abortions are illegal in Korea except to save the life of the mother and a few extenuating circumstances, the author expects that abortions, especially among younger women, are increasing and that they are easy to obtain. This expectation is confirmed by comments made by female students. Their

discussions of abortion are almost cavalier, and the issue of whether or not the fetus is an unborn life is seldom considered.

The situation in Korea today compared to that five years ago reminds the author of the situation in the United States in the late 1960's compared to that in the early 1960's. The 1960's in the United States was the time of the so-called sexual revolution, and the period from the mid-1990's to the present appears to be Korea's sexual revolution. In the 1980's students were never seen handling hands on campus. In the early 1990's, they were seen holding hands and occasionally kissing. In the late 1990's, more and more couples with obviously close personal relationships became commonplace on campus. However, in spite of the reality, such things were not openly discussed with seniors (older people). Today, not only are such relationships being discussed, the discussions clearly imply no stigma with respect to sexual relations before marriage. Although stories of the husband who divorces his wife because he finds that she is not a virgin on their wedding night still persist, conversations with female students indicate that, although some want to save themselves for their husbands, even they see no problem with pre-marital sex between consenting couples. They view this as a matter of personal choice. Male students are more conservative on this matter, i.e., many want their wives to be virgins when they get married; however, even here, the author has noticed a significant change in the last two or three years, with more and more male students stating that they don't care if their wives are not virgins on their wedding nights. Possibly, this is due to the fact that more and more men are having sexual relations with their girlfriends, so they can no longer rationalize the conviction that their future wives must be virgins.

Some conversations with college students, some statistics, and some newspaper stories of middle-school and high-school girls selling themselves for sex indicate that the feeling of sexual freedom has spread below the college levels. One article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* states that as many as 17% of high-school students are sexually active, and interviews with several high-school students indicate that this number probably would be larger except for the fact that most high-school students are preoccupied with entering a prestigious college, so they have no time for personal relationships.⁴ Clearly, Korea is faced with a problem similar to that faced in other developed/industrialized nations, i.e., what kinds of sex education, if any, should be given in public schools.

C. Homosexuality

In the mid-1980's, the author was invited to a dinner hosted by students he was tutoring at a Korean company. Everyone was to meet at a specified time in front of Pagoda Park. The author arrived early and was approached by a male asking if the author wanted to go some place special. The author was a bit confused because he was under the impression that homosexuality did not exist in Korea. Much to the author's relief, one of the students, a female, arrived and came to his assistance. The young man then left. The female student tried to explain away what had happened, but without mentioning the idea of homosexuality. After that, the author became aware, on several occasions, of foreigners who had come to Korea because the climate for homosexuals was supposedly much better, meaning that as long as homosexuality was kept private, Koreans would look the other way. In other words, we have the Korean version of "don't ask, don't tell." Officially, homosexuality does not exist in Korea while in reality the homosexual population as a percentage of the total population was probably the same as it was in other countries.

The situation with regards to homosexuality began to change, as far as the author could see, about five years ago. At that time, during a current affairs class, students were discussing homosexuality in the United States. At the end of the class, they reported their conclusions to the rest of the class. After the report, one male student asked if he could make a comment. He stood up and stated that as a homosexual, he felt obligated to correct the misconceptions held by the other students. He stated that he never learned to be homosexual and was never taught to be homosexual. He just noticed that as he entered his teen years he found males more attractive than females. He also stated that he felt uncomfortable with his feelings at first and tried to change, but could not, and that he had been happier since accepting his homosexual feeling. He also stated that the number of homosexuals in Korea was much larger than the non-homosexual population realized and that Hankuk University of Foreign Studies had a gay students club, a fact the other students did not know.^{5,6}

About four years ago an actor and TV talent, Hong Sukchon, openly revealed his homosexuality during a TV interview. As a result, he was fired from his job and received a lot of hate mail.⁷ Three years ago, the students of current affairs at Hankuk

University of Foreign Studies managed to arrange for Hong to speak at the university during class time. The word of his presence spread, and many students who were not members of the class began to come quietly into the back of the classroom. Interest became so intense that Hong agreed to move to a bigger conference classroom where he spoke for two more hours. He answered questions frankly and stated that he had thought about leaving Korea because of the discrimination he had been subjected to after going public with his homosexuality. He said that he decided to stay in Korea to fight for homosexual rights. The author was impressed by the student interest in Hong and his homosexuality and felt that Hong had been able to convey to the students the idea that he was a human being, just like they were. He was looking for a happy life with a lifelong partner that he loved, the only difference being that his partner was a man. Since that class, the author has noticed that the students' attitudes toward homosexuality have become more tolerant, with females tending to be more understanding than males.

The most recent discussion topic of interest in current affairs class has been same-sex marriages because of the recent controversy in the United States. Students feel that it is just a matter of time until this becomes a subject of controversy in Korea. Again, student attitudes seem to be favorable or ambivalent toward the idea, except for the question of same-sex couples' adopting children. In that case, the attitude was less generous. Females also had more tolerant views than men, but the margin was not as wide as it had been in the past. Several students also pointed out that most universities in Korea now have gay students' clubs that operate openly, in contrast to the first such club at Yonsei University, formed and operated secretly in 1995.

D. Pop Culture

Young Koreans are following the lead of other countries, in particular Japan, when it comes to fashion, music, and behavior, and this has been a cause for great concern. Many older Koreans, and a few younger ones, feel that Korean culture is being polluted by Japanese and other foreign cultures. For example, many taboo-shattering shows exist on Korean TV, such as the Korean TV show "The Woman Next Door," which has been described as the Korean equivalent of "Sex in the City" and focuses on the marriages and extramarital affairs of three women.⁸ In addition, young performers

are emulating teenage idols from other countries; in particular, Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera are given as examples of non-Korean superstars who are having a bad effect on Korean youth. Many Korean pop stars are wearing sexually-revealing clothes and have introduced sexual dance movements into their performances. Young Koreans are also imitating their favorite pop stars, are wearing sexually-revealing clothes, and are sporting body piercing and hair of all colors. The effects of these trends can be seen even on university campuses, where young female students go to classes with short miniskirts, or hip-hugger jeans, and bare midriff tops so that their navels and large portions of their abdomens are exposed. Body piercing, while not prevalent, is not unusual and is more common among women than men. All colors of hair are seen in both men and women, and men are more commonly wearing earrings and other accessories.

Although the current pop culture is considered outrageous in comparison to tradition, it is still quite subdued when compared to Japanese pop culture. One interesting observation is the Korean wave about which most young Koreans are proud. The Korean wave refers to the influence that Korean pop culture, fashion, and entertainment are having on China. It seems that China has become a major market for all forms of Korean pop-culture entertainment and that Chinese stars are emulating Korean superstars. Although Koreans are embracing pop culture from other countries, especially Japan, while at the same time, to some degree, resenting the resulting cultural pollution, they are proud of the pop culture they are exporting to China. The author wonders if the Chinese are experiencing similar ambivalent feelings.

E. Racism vs. Anti-foreigner Bias vs. Koreans' Feeling of Oneness

Koreans are noted as a friendly people. However, because of their past suffering at the hands of foreign armies, particularly those of China and Japan, they are leery of foreigners. This mostly shows up in restrictions on the activities of foreigners and foreign businesses. In the past, such restrictions were severe: for example, no foreign ownership of property or businesses, no bank loans to foreigners, no credit cards for foreigners without a cosigner, and different pay and benefits for non-Korean workers in Korea; however, over the past several years, such restrictions have begun to disappear, although not entirely.

Koreans, however, are still sensitive to anything they view as criticism of Korea by a non-Korean or to anything that they believe is an attack on, or a wrongdoing toward, a Korean by a non-Korean. Obvious examples are the Korean reactions to Brigitte Bardot's criticism of Koreans eating dog, to Jay Leno's dog-eating joke about the disqualification of the Korean speed skater during the winter Olympics, and to the benching the Florida Marlin's Korean first baseman over an obscene gesture. There are numerous other examples of this phenomenon. One is the subway incident several years ago in which a Korean man confronted American soldiers for allegedly sexually assaulting a Korean woman. The Korean man followed the soldiers as they exited the subway, an altercation ensued, and the Korean was hospitalized with injuries sustained during the altercation. It turned out that the Korean woman was the wife of one of the soldiers and that the soldier apparently had patted her on the buttocks. There is no doubt that this behavior was unacceptable public behavior by Korean standards; however, it did not amount to sexual assault, and the Korean woman had not asked for assistance. Nevertheless, the soldiers were arrested and put on trial.

This quirk of the Korean collective personality is understandable in consideration of Korea's past history and should present no problem as long as non-Koreans understand that Koreans will react collectively to a perceived threat from an "outsider". This collective persona not only applies to perceived threats from non-Koreans but also to criticisms of Korea made by non-Koreans. If one wants to do business or live in Korea, one must learn that the surest way to get a course of action rejected by Koreans is to cast it in the framework of a solution to a problem in Korea. Although Koreans might readily admit that the problem exists, they do not react kindly to a non-Korean calling it to their attention. This collective characteristic has not changed much over the years since the early 1980's.

As a closing comment, although Koreans are not, in general, racially biased, they do appear to have a bias against black people. Several years ago, a black instructor at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies was asked to participate in a KBS (Korean Broadcasting System)-sponsored study of Korean racism. He was to approach Koreans in public places and on subways, supposedly to ask for information. He was also to sit next to Koreans on the subway whenever possible. The result showed that Koreans tended

to avoid him when he tried to approach them. On the subway, many got up and moved when he sat next to them. These instances were filmed secretly by KBS cameramen and were supposed to be used as part of a program on Korean racism and Korean attitudes toward foreigners; however, the author was never able to determine if the show was ever aired.

In the author's opinion, based on discussions with students and Korean friends, these Korean reactions are probably not due to racism in the sense understood by most American; rather, they are due to a lack of Korean sensitivity to the feelings of minorities, especially minorities that, because of past experiences elsewhere in the world, may already be sensitive to the issue of racial prejudice. This lack of sensitivity may be caused by the homogeneity of the Korean people, who never had to worry about such concerns in the past. If that observation is correct, this aspect of Korean social behavior will have to change as more and more peoples of color visit, work, and live in Korea and as more and more Koreans marry non-Koreans. If Korean society does not adapt to the increased presence of non-Koreans, racial tensions on an unprecedented scale could lead to major social problems. For example, in 2003, of the approximately 26,000 Koreans who married non-Koreans, a 61.2% increase over the approximately 16,000 such marriage that took place in 2002, over 19,000 were men who married women from third world countries such as China, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand.⁹ With the declining birth rate and the Korean preference for male babies, this trend is most likely to continue because more and more men will be forced to look for mates outside of Korea.

F. The Red Devils

Probably the most significant occurrence in Korean society during the last decade was the Red Devil culture surrounding the Korean soccer team during the 2002 World Cup. The Red Devil phenomenon was apparent in the behavior of Koreans at all levels of society, and the success of the Korean team and the feeling that the Red Devil's support was in some way responsible for the team's success sparked a re-emergence of nationalism on a scale not seen in recent years. As a result, Koreans, especially Koreans in their teens, twenties, and thirties, now take tremendous pride in Korea and want to see Korea become an important and influential player in the international arena. These Red Devils, the internet generation, were largely responsible for the election of President Roh Moo-

hyun whom they hoped would bring reform to Korean society, as opposed to Lee Hoi-chang, and equal status to Korea in its political and military relations with the United States. This Red Devil sentiment has also affected the views of North Korea held by many younger Koreans, as will be discussed later in this paper.¹⁰ The author expects this wave of nationalism to continue and to have a major impact on the future of the ROK – US alliance, which will be addressed below in greater detail.

G. The Kwangju Incident

The Kwangju incident, although still a sensitive issue in Korean society, is no longer the volatile issue it once was. Many Koreans, particularly Korean students and residents of the Honam area, blamed the Korean government and the United States for the tragedy. Yearly, on the anniversary of the incident demonstrations involving sizable numbers of people and ceremonies involving civic leaders were held throughout the country. At his university, the author encountered American flags being burned and American flags painted on the roadway so that cars would drive over them. In his classes, the author constantly encountered questions, with an anti-American sentiment, about the involvement of the United States and the fact that the United States appeared to take no positive action to stop the use of Korean army troops against the citizens of Kwangju.

In recent years, the demonstration and ceremonies have still been held, but they have been rather subdued compared to those of previous years. The author's students no longer seem to blame the United States for the incident or for its lack of action to prevent it. In fact, they seem to have put the incident in perspective and are willing to allow history to make the final judgments as to the reasons for that tragedy and the persons and organizations responsible for it. This is probably due to the fact that the students in college today were not even born at the time of the Kwangju incident. What they know about the incident, they were told by their parents or they read in history books. However, in his classes, the author finds that bitter feelings still exist among some of the students from that region. In many instances, the author can tell which students are from the vicinity of Kwangju simply from the rancor in their papers on sensitive subjects. Obviously, the bitter feelings of parents, relatives, and friends, many of whom may have had relatives killed or injured during the incident, have been passed

down to the next generation. Whether or not such bitter feelings will subside remains to be seen; however, it seems unlikely to happen as long as regional animosities, Kyeongsan vs Honam, continue to exist for the simple reason that the military leaders at Kwangju were from the Kyeongsan region while the victims were from the Honam region.*

Korean Politics: Observations and Discussion

A. The Presidents

President Noh Tae-woo was the first democratically-elected president of Korea, but he is not viewed as such by many Koreans because of his military background, his close association with Chun Doo-hwan, and his complicity in the Kwangju incident. Many Koreans view Kim Young-sam as the first democratically-elected president of the modern era.

President Kim Young-sam's administration is remembered for the monetary crisis of 1997 and the corruption involving his son. Many older and professional Koreans still refer to his presidency as a civilian, rather than a military, dictatorship. This is due in part to his merging his party with the ruling party in order to capture the presidential nomination, which many viewed as a betrayal of his former dissident views, his introduction of the real-name system, which was opposed by many influential Koreans, and his handling of the Chun Doo-hwan affair. Although his position on calls to punish those involved in the Kwangju incident was to let history judge those responsible, ex-president Chun was arrested within hours of his criticizing Kim and his government before departing for a temple in Kangwon Province. Although President Kim often spoke of the necessity for Korea to globalize and was responsible for many laws to increase globalization, globalization did not increase significantly during his administration because administrative procedures were never put in place to implement the laws.

President Kim Dae-jung will be remembered mostly for his visit to North Korea and his "sunshine policy" to normalize inter-Korean relations, which won him the Nobel Peace Prize. It is a

* The recent efforts by the government, which became headlines after this paper was presented, to correct history with respect to those who benefited by collaboration with the Japanese during the colonial period is apt to foment a similar feeling of animosity between various segments of society.

shame that later allegations of money being transferred to North Korea in exchange for the summit may diminish his accomplishment. Concerns exist over the secrecy of the transfer and the fact that the money may have been used to benefit the military. Overlooked is the reality that governments often have to give up something in secret in order to reach a loftier goal. President Kim's accomplishments also include resolution of the 1997 monetary crisis and significant progress toward the globalization of Korean society.

President Roh Moo-hyun, a self-educated lawyer and civil rights activist, was elected mainly due to the efforts of younger Koreans (those in their 20's and 30's) who were looking for social reform, an end to corruption, increased social programs, better protection of civil rights, rapprochement with North Korea, and an equal partnership with the United States. One might say that the election of President Roh was the direct result of the increased nationalism invoked by Korea's success in the 2002 World Cup and the activities of the Red Devils. However, his administration has been plagued by his apparent inability to compromise and by many members of his administration lacking political experience. Many feel that he could have avoided impeachment by apologizing to the people after the Committee on Election Law concluded that he had violated election laws by supporting the Uri Party. Not only did he refuse to do so at the time, but it is unclear whether he has done so in light of the Constitutional Court's ruling that he indeed violated the law but the violation was not sufficient to warrant removal from office. Younger Koreans believe that he did apologize, but older, more conservative, Koreans say that he did not. In addition, his efforts to root out corruption were hampered by alleged corruption involving some of his close aides and by the fact that many of his nominees for key positions have been accused of corrupt activities within a few days of their nominations. One must wonder if this is due to the inability of the presidential staff to evaluate adequately the suitability of candidates for key positions or to the success of administration efforts to root out corruption. The author often refers to president Roh as the Jimmy Carter of Korea. Roh is a man of ideals, and most people hope that his programs will succeed, but it is doubtful that significant progress will be made during his administration because of his stubbornness, his inability to compromise, and his amateurish staff.

B. The Impeachment

Many young Koreans opposed the impeachment of Roh on the grounds that the National Assembly was trying to subvert the will of the people. They believed President Roh had not violated the election law or, if he had, the violation was too minor to warrant impeachment. Further, they thought the actions of the National Assembly were unconstitutional, and the impeachment brought shame upon Korea in the eyes of the world. Only one of these objections had any shred of validity, as later indicated in the Constitutional Court's ruling that, although President Roh had violated the election law, the violation was not sufficient to warrant removal from office. In the author's opinion, the ruling of the Constitutional Court and the management of government affairs by Prime Minister Goh Gun are signs of a functioning mature democracy and have given Koreans reason to feel proud, rather than ashamed, of their government. However, President Roh's statement that the results of the April 15 elections vindicated him and his programs is wishful thinking at best and a delusion at worst. The election was decided along regional lines, with the Grand National Party (GNP) and the Uri Party gaining overwhelming victories in areas that could be considered their traditional strongholds. The only places where the impeachment may have had any effect are Seoul and Gyeonggi Province with their larger numbers of younger, more liberal voters. The biggest factor in the Uri Party's gaining control of the National Assembly was the demise of the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP), the party of Kim Dae-jung, which lost 53 of its 62 seats, with most of those seats going to the Uri Party or the Democratic Labor Party.¹¹ This observation was confirmed by the humiliating, almost total, defeat of Uri Party candidates in the June local by-elections.

C. Regionalism and the Structure of Korean Political Parties

As the April 15 elections show, regionalism is still alive and well in Korea.¹² Although most view this as an evil, almost no one can come up with a cure. The author has often said that being a member of the GNP in the Honam region is like being a Republican in southern United States prior to 1970. The South's support for the Republican Party in the United States dates to the time when a Republican president, Abraham Lincoln, freed the slaves and conducted war in the early 1860's to prevent the southern states

from leaving the Union to form the Confederate States of America. For a hundred years, the situation remained unchanged until people and businesses from the North moved to the South in search of a better business environment. The influx of those with different ideas and different backgrounds caused a profound change in the political climate in southern United States. A similar significant movement of people and businesses between the major regions of Korea will probably have to occur to bring about a cross fertilization of ideas before the problem of regionalism will disappear. However, the capital relocation envisioned by President Roh is of too small a scale to have much of an effect in reducing regionalism (see the discussion below).

The demise of the Millennium Democratic Party in the April 15 elections re-enforces the fact that Korean parties have been, and still are to a large extent, built around individuals rather than political philosophies. The MDP, the party of Kim Dae-jung, lost its political power simply because Kim Dae-jung was no longer in a position of power. As an ex-president, he can hope for no other national office of significance, so party supporters can expect no benefit in return for their support. The MDP was hurt further by President Roh's refusal to become its central figure and by his expressing his support for and his intention to join the Uri Party. In essence, President Roh became the power figure in the Uri Party, and that party had success in areas previously dominated by the MDP.

Some may argue that the MDP lost voter support due to its cooperation with the GNP in passing the presidential impeachment motion. If this were the case, the procession of sam-bo il-bae (three steps, one bow) of Chu Mi-ae, the chief campaigner of the MDP, to apologize for that cooperation should have been sufficient, by traditional Korean standards, to win back at least some of the party supporters and avoid a humiliating defeat at the polls. It wasn't, however the fact that the Korean people have an overwhelming tendency to forgive those who show adequate remorse for their actions leads the author to conclude that the MDP's cooperation with the GNP in passing the impeachment motion was not the reason for the MDP's collapse as a viable political party.

On the other hand, the GNP, the primary mover behind the impeachment motion, appears to have outlasted its previous power figures, Kim Young-sam and Lee Hoi-chang. The GNP's success was due in large part to the charismatic efforts of its new leader,

Park Geun-hye, who was able to consolidate power easily after Lee's departure, an indication of the party's staying power and the possible birth of a political philosophy upon which the party can continue to function, and possibly to the misguided remarks of Uri Party chairperson, Chung Dong-young, who outraged older Koreans by telling them that those in their 60's and 70's need not vote in the April 15 elections because they would probably retire soon.¹³ Thus, the GNP seems to be evolving into a national conservative party, the Korean equivalent of the American Republican Party. Furthermore, the Democratic labor party appears to have gained influence solely on the basis of its political philosophy. The only remaining question is the future of the Uri Party. Will it become the party of Roh Moo-hyun and disappear after his departure from the political scene or will it become a national liberal party, the Korean equivalent of the American Democratic Party?

Based on the above, one may conclude that political parties in Korea, to some extent, have shown a movement toward parties based on political philosophies rather than individuals. The author feels that this tendency is a vital step in the continuing maturation of the Korean political system and will be a key to success in the government's anti-corruption program. In a party built around an all-powerful individual, that individual doles out favors in return for support and is given support in return for favors. Sometimes this symbiosis between the all-powerful central figure and the supporters is overt, sometimes covert. In others words, it is an open invitation for corruption at worst and the cause of ill-advised governmental programs at best.

D. North Korea and the ROK – US alliance

Although older, more conservative Koreans still see North Korea as a threat, younger Koreans, whose parents were not yet born or were young children at the time of the Korean War, view North Koreans as their brothers and sisters. Many are openly proud that North Korea has defied the United States and maintained its sovereign right to develop nuclear weapons for its defense, and they wish that their government would exercise its sovereign rights more forcefully as far as relations with the United States are concerned. Further, they feel that such weapons, if used, would be used against Japan and America, not against South Korea.¹⁴ They seem to have no concern that a North Korean nuclear test might cause Japan to initiate its own nuclear weapons development program, a possibility that has already been alluded to in Japanese newspapers. Since the

Japanese possess superior technical skills, more than enough money, and ample supplies of plutonium, they would, without doubt, rapidly produce a nuclear arsenal that would outnumber and outclass that of North Korea. This, in turn, could spark an increase in Chinese nuclear programs and a South Korean decision to undertake its own program in response to the Japanese and the Chinese programs. In other words, northeast Asia would become involved in a full-blown nuclear arms race. In the author's current affairs classes, when the possibility of a nuclear Japan has been broached, the students have all seemed to have second thoughts on the advisability of North Korea's continuing to pursue its nuclear weapons programs. Fears of the re-emergence of a militaristic Japan armed with nuclear weapons has seemed to outweigh pride in North Korea's accomplishments and its insistence on maintaining its sovereignty.

Even though the world has changed significantly since the end of the cold war with the collapse of the former Soviet Union and major changes in an economizing dynamic and increasingly capitalistic communist China, few major changes have been made to the ROK-US alliance since the Korean War, other than Korea's seeking, and to some degree obtaining, an more equal partnership. With an ever-increasing segment of the South Korean population being more distantly removed from the Korean War, attitudes toward North Korea and the United States, especially among the youth and left-leaning liberals, mostly in academia, have changed drastically. A 2002 Gallup Poll in July 2003 revealed that only 33% of the respondents feared North Korean aggression, compared to 69% a decade earlier. Another poll conducted by *Naeilsinmun* (tomorrow newspaper) revealed that 58.3% of the respondents held a negative attitude toward the United States and that 42.6% felt that the United States was militarily present in South Korea for its own national interest. Only 26.5% agreed that the US's military presence was to support the security of South Korea.¹⁵ The best-selling novel in Korea, *The Third Scenario*, has a plot built around the United States provoking a war between the two Koreas in order to stop reunification, and a former senior advisor in South Korea's Unification Ministry has claimed that South Korea has better relations with North Korea and feels less threatened, so South Korea sees less need to rely on the United States. Even, the usually bellicose North Koreans are softening their approach. Recently, loudspeaker broadcasts in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), have

referred to the peoples of the two Koreas as brothers who can no longer live separated.¹⁶ All of these factors, along with Korea's demands for an equal partnership with the United States, Kim Dae-jung's sunshine policy, and President's Roh's philosophy of dialogue and rapprochement with the North, lead one to foresee a drastic change in the alliance.

Some speculate that changes in the alliance are already beginning to be seen. The withdrawal of 3,000-4,000 troops to support the conflict in Iraq and the announced future withdrawal of 12,000-13,000 more troops are seen by many as the first steps in a US disengagement from Korea. The plans to move the 2nd Infantry Division from its bases north of the Han River to bases south of the river is seen as a removal of the US trip wire against North Korean provocation. The author finds it interesting that many of his students who had been in favor of greater independence for South Korea and against the US's military presence in South Korea were suddenly not so sure that the announced withdrawals and relocations were good ideas at this time. In particular, many decided that maintaining a US presence within striking distance of the North Korean Army was essential to the security of South Korea.

The author speculates that the announcements are a first step in a planned, or for that matter unplanned, realignment of US forces and priorities in northeast Asia. Simple geopolitical logic dictates that China will soon hold the economic and military balance of power in the region. In fact, China has already replaced the United States as South Korea's leading trading partner. Thus, it would be in the interest of the United States to attempt to move China more into the limelight with respect to solving the North Korean nuclear crisis. After all, it is in China's best interests to forestall a nuclear Japan and to protect one of its major trading partners, South Korea.

At present, China is somewhat reluctant to take the initiative for internal reasons, such as halting the flow of North Korean refugees into Jilin Province, stopping the rise of ethnonationalism among ethnic Chinese-Koreans, enhancing China's influence on the Korean peninsula, and protecting one of its major trading partners. China's policy, according to Samuel S. Kim of Columbia University, appears to contain five no's: no instability, no collapse, no nukes, no refugees or defectors, and no conflict escalation. However, China's fear of a rash US action to resolve the crisis has led it to take a more proactive role which it might be

persuaded to increase with some prodding from Washington. As China becomes more and more proactive in the region, there is less reason for the US to maintain a military presence, especially when those forces might be better utilized elsewhere. In addition, it is highly unlikely that the Bush administration will be able to take any adverse action against North Korea with US forces still deployed on the peninsula. First, South Korea is not likely to give its permission for US troop moving against North Korea to use its territory and air space. Second, US troops will be open to the possibility of harm from violent demonstrations and be in striking range of a North Korean retaliatory attack. On the other hand, a complete withdrawal from the Korean peninsula will essentially give the United States a free hand to take whatever action it deems necessary against North Korea. Surely North Korea's leader Kim Jong-il recognizes this and must, to a certain degree, be concerned about the recent announcements. This may cause a change in the North Korean strategy at the six-party talks.¹⁷

The author feels that an increased relationship between the two Koreas through exchanges, cooperation, and dialogue, is the road that will lead to reunification and that former president Kim Dae-jung may be the ideal person to foster such improved relations. However, he cannot help but also feel that the world situation, as well as the demographic and social changes that have taken place in Korea over the past decade, has caused the US to reevaluate the ROK-US alliance and will ultimately lead to the total disengagement of US military forces from Korea. Kim Jong-il, during his April visit to Beijing, made clear his willingness to reciprocate Kim Dae-jung's visit to Pyongyang in June 2002. Such a visit should strengthen inter-Korean relations and promote a spirit of peaceful co-existence on the Korean peninsula.¹⁸

It is interesting that younger, more liberal Koreans support John Kerry in the upcoming U.S. elections because they feel that he will react more favorably toward Korean desires for an equal partnership with the U.S. and better relations with North Korea while older, more conservative Koreans support President Bush because they feel he is more apt to maintain a strong alliance and defense posture on the Korean peninsula. In fact, in the author's opinion, the actual situation is the exact opposite. President Bush, if re-elected, will most likely proceed with the withdrawals as announced while Kerry is more likely to slow, or even stop, them.

E. The Capital Relocation

The recent controversy over the relocation of the government to an area in one of the Chungchong provinces has mostly been discussed within the framework of President Roh's refusal to submit the proposal to a national referendum as he had promised during his election campaign, his reason being that the executive branch should not interfere with a program that has already been approved by the National Assembly. He holds this position even though a majority of South Koreans no longer support the relocation, and the GNP, the main supporter of the original bill, is also expressing a more cautious view on the issue. The controversy has been so intense that the real issues surrounding the proposed relocation have been lost in the arguments over President Roh's style of governing.

The government's basic motivation for moving the capital is to relieve the socio-economic problems in Seoul, such as high housing costs, high land prices, traffic congestion, and environmental pollution, to achieve a more balanced regional development, and to reduce the widening gap between the Seoul metropolitan area and other regions.¹⁹ Some of the author's professional friends have cast this thinking as Seoul's plan to create a Korean version of Washington, DC, and New York City. The new capital would be the center of government while Seoul would remain the financial center. Several arguments are being presented against the proposal. First is the estimated cost of up to 120 trillion won (about 100 billion dollars).²⁰ Many feel that the Korean economy is not strong enough to undertake such a project. In addition, concern exists over the timely, proper, and effective re-utilization or disposition of vacant government-owned properties left behind in Seoul after the relocation.²¹ Another is an argument that relocation will neither relieve Seoul's socio-economic problems nor balance regional developments. Students have expressed another concern. Most are looking forward to the reunification of the peninsula and feel that a site south of Seoul would be an inappropriate location for the capital of a unified Korea. They want the government to delay its decision until after reunification.

In the past, two efforts by the government to relieve the population concentration in Seoul (nearly half of the South Korea population lives in the Seoul metropolitan area), come to the author's mind. In the early 1980's, the government moved several research institutes from Seoul to Daedok science town (in the

Daejeon area), and it required the universities in Seoul to open provincial campuses with the goal of ultimately moving those universities to provincial areas. Although the institutes moved as planned, a large number of employees who moved to the Daejeon area left their families in Seoul, because Seoul offered better cultural, medical, and educational facilities; only single employees and employees with no children or pre-school-age children actually moved their families to the new location. Only after the development of the Daejeon metropolitan area following the 1993 World Exposition did a large number of families actually relocate. Even though Seoul's major universities established provincial campuses in accordance with the government plan, the original goal was never realized. Today, the same universities are still located in Seoul, and their provincial campuses have become separate universities with separate admission requirements and separate diplomas. Even the government's own projection that the initial population of the new capital will be around 500,000 families appears to be too little to have any sizable effect.

While the fundamental idea of two centers, a governmental center and a financial center, is a sound one, the author, based on experience, is skeptical that a relocation of the capital will meet the stated objectives. As long as the author has lived in Korea, the population of the Seoul metropolitan area has increased, socio-economic and environmental problems have gotten worse, and all government efforts to correct the situation have failed. The main cause is the simple fact that a very large percentage of the students admitted to the most prestigious universities in Seoul, which almost guarantees success, as evidenced by the large number of graduates from these universities in influential, well-paying positions, attended high schools in the Seoul metropolitan area; in fact, many attended high schools in specific wards (Ku) of Seoul, so the number of people desiring to live in those wards has exceeded the available living accommodations, leading to an over-inflated housing market. Since the government has not been very effective in addressing this perception that the road to success is through certain universities in Seoul, families with students will continue to flock to Seoul in large numbers, offsetting any decrease in population resulting from a relocation of government offices. Another cause is increased job opportunity in Seoul because a large number of major corporations, both foreign and Korean, are located there. Unless these corporations move, people will continue to

come to Seoul in search of a better life, especially when the economy is bad, as it is now. Some have suggested that the major corporations be given incentives to move. While this may work for Korean corporations, it is unlikely to succeed with foreign corporations because the infrastructure, for example, adequate foreign school facilities, do not exist. In spite of globalization efforts, even Seoul itself still has an inadequate number of foreign schools, and those that exist, except for missionary and religiously affiliated schools, are extremely expensive.

Education: Observations and Discussion

Education in Korea is driven by the desire of parents to have their children admitted to the top four universities in Seoul: Seoul National University, Ihwa Woman's University, Yonsei University, and Korea University. Students and their families try to enter the best high schools with the best records of getting students admitted to the top four. As previously mentioned, many families are moving to Seoul because the best opportunities for admission to the top four can be found there. This influx into Seoul has led to a distorted real-estate market and to a decrease in the quality of education in provincial areas. Even the best teachers want to teach in Seoul, so there are two tests for teacher certification, one for Seoul and one for the rest of the country. In addition, principals try to satisfy the parents by offering so-called voluntary classes before and after school. Parents in an attempt to get an advantage for their offspring send them to private institutes to study past college entrance exams and to study the next-year's school subjects and/or hire private tutors. By studying the next-year's subject, the students hope to be ahead of their contemporaries and get better grades, but since everyone who can afford to send their sons and daughters to institutes is doing so, it is doubtful that any advantage, other than staying even, is realized.

The costs of attending institutes and obtaining private tutoring have placed a tremendous burden on families and have created a social abyss between those who can afford it and those who cannot. Parents have committed suicide because they were unable to afford this outside education for their children. Students have committed suicide over failure to be accepted at one of the top four because they felt that they had disappointed their parents who had sacrificed so much for them. Because of these high costs, many families are now sending their children overseas to countries such

as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States for education. This exodus of students has created two major problems. The short-term problem is the outflow of capital to support those students, which is exactly what the fragile Korean economy does not need at this particular time. The long-term problem is the potential brain drain that may result from a large number of these students deciding to become citizens of their adopted countries.

The government has recognized the problem, but has been unable to devise an effective remedy. Recently, in order to reduce the financial burden of private lessons, the government initiated an educational program on public TV to prepare for the college entrance exam. Accordingly, to a friend of the author, who is a private tutor, attendance at institutes dropped immediately after the start of the new program, but has now returned to pre-educational-program levels. Now students say that watching the new TV program is an extra chore that has been added to their already busy schedules. High-school students who want to enter college go to school, attend private institutes after school and/or take private lessons, do homework, and then watch the new college preparatory program on TV, getting to bed around one or two a.m. High-school seniors attend classes before and after school. The classes after school can go until 11 p.m., after which they watch the new TV program and do their homework. During recent English language contests, the author was shocked at answers to questions about the most serious problems facing Korea. In many cases, the answer was "I don't know. I don't have any time to watch the TV news or read newspapers because I am too busy preparing for the college entrance exam."

The problem has also been exacerbated by the last three administrations in which a large majority of the cabinet members and senior advisors were graduates from the top four universities in Seoul. In this respect, the author was extremely disappointed with Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. Being self-educated men, they were expected to name graduates from other university to senior advisory positions. Although they did so to a limited degree, it was not enough to have any substantial impact.

Several years ago, the president of Seoul National University suggested a solution. According to that proposal, students would be admitted to the top four universities on a population basis. If an area had 10% of the total number of high-school seniors, it would be allocated 10% of the openings in the

incoming freshman classes. On the surface, this may not appear to be an effective approach, but deeper thought suggests that such a system would not only solve the education problem but also lead to an outflow from Seoul of families looking for less competitive environments in which their children might have a higher probability of admission to one of the top four. For some reason unknown to the author, this proposal was never given serious consideration. Now, with the increasing numbers of students going overseas for education and with many of them probably staying there after their education has been completed, the government will be forced to come up with an effective solution or face a potential brain drain.

The Korean Economy: Observations and Discussion

The Korean economy has made great strides since the IMF crisis of 1997, becoming in 2002, according to a recent report in *The Korea Times*, the world's 11th largest economy with a GNP of \$543 billion and a per-capita gross national income of \$11,400.²² In spite of these statistics, the economy, from the author's point of view, seems to have several basic flaws. The economy is still export dominated, with domestic consumption being unable to support the economy. This might not be a problem for a diversified export market, but Korea does not have such a market. In the past, the Korean economy depended on exports to the United States; now it depends on exports to China. The Korean market is also indirectly influenced by the US market because China is increasing trade with the United States. Labor conflicts are giving second thoughts to foreign investors and are creating problems for small manufacturing firms that cannot afford the increased labor costs. Many such firms are outsourcing to Asian markets with cheaper labor, such as China and Vietnam, leading to increased unemployment.^{23,24} In spite of announced programs to reduce government's control of business, the government seems to interfere more than ever before. As an example, the government's solution to any perceived distortion of the financial market, such as the current real-estate market and the over-inflated prices in the Kangnam ward, seems to be more government regulation.^{25,26} The government never seems to consider de-regulating the market and letting free-market forces take care of the problem.

In the author's opinion a recent editorial in *The Korea Times* accurately sums up the current status of the Korean economy

by giving 10 mysteries: Western-style reform has not been effective; in fact, it may have been detrimental. Seoul has continued to grow and the rural community's quality of life has decreased in spite of the government's policy of balanced regional development. Income distribution has become more disparate even though the government has actively supported programs of egalitarianism and wealth redistribution. The competitiveness of small companies has decreased and economic power has become more concentrated despite the policy of controlling chaebol. The exodus of school children for study overseas has increased even though the government is seeking to reform and standardize education. Government control of finance has increased amid calls for financial liberalization. The Roh administration wants to discard Park Chung-hee's economic development model, the model that created the miracle of the Han River. The government has strengthened policies that will erode corporate competitiveness.²⁷

In spite of the bleak short-term outlook, the author sees a rosy future for the Korean economy. His opinion is based on the greater equality being seen in Korean society and the developing maturity and stability of the Korean political system. The economy just needs a little more time to catch up, and the government needs a little more time to overcome its fear of allowing free-market forces to take control.

Conclusions

The author has discussed many aspects of Korea society not from the point of view of an expert on Korea but from the perspective of a non-Korean resident of Korea for the past 22 years. It is obvious that enormous social change has occurred over the last decade and that the change is similar to that which took place in the United States in the 1960's and 1970's; however, Korea underwent the change at a much faster rate. The author expects that the divorce rate will continue to grow as feminism increases and that it will finally level out and start to decrease as men adapt to women's increasing desire for personal fulfillment. Korea will also be faced with an aging society with fewer younger members to pay the bill for social welfare. Thus, the pension and national health systems will have to adjust or face financial difficulty. Finally, the non-Korean presence in Korea will continue to grow and will force an adjustment of the Korean attitude toward non-Koreans. In summary, social changes will continue to occur at a rapid pace, and those

changes will, in many cases, be drastic changes, but in the long term, Korean society will be the better for those changes.

Progress in the political arena has been phenomenal, with the handling of the recent impeachment clearly showing that Korea has become a mature democracy. In addition, political parties based on political philosophies rather than personalities appear to be emerging. All of this bodes well for Korea's political future. However, regionalism, as seen in the recent April 15 election, is a lingering social sickness that needs to be addressed. The Roh administration hopes that the planned capital relocation might, to some extent, relieve the symptoms of this problem; however, the author suspects that even if the plan is implemented, which is doubtful at this time, regionalism will continue as a major social concern.

Going along with the political maturation is a growing nationalism which calls for closer ties with North Korea with the hope for reunification in the not too distant future and for equal status with, if not greater independence from, the United States. The author feels that the United States is in the midst of a major re-evaluation of its policy toward Asia. If President Bush is re-elected, troop withdrawals will most likely continue as announced or be accelerated, and the U.S. attitude toward North Korea will continue to be hard line. On the other hand, if Senator Kerry is elected, the opposite will most likely occur. In any event, in the author's opinion, ultimately, China will become the dominant power in Asia, with U.S. acquiescence, and the United States will rely more and more on China to keep North Korea from becoming a major problem. As to reunification of the peninsula, an implosion of North Korea or a coup is highly unlikely. Although the United States and Japan would be more than happy to see a unified peninsula because it would solve the problem of North Korea's nuclear program, China still appears to have some fear of the economic and political instability that might occur in the early stages of the reunification process. Until that fear is put to rest and China sees a reunified peninsula to be in its best interest, reunification will be impossible.

Changes in other areas such as the economy and education have been almost non-existent or less than adequate. Although the long-term economic outlook is probably rosy, the Korean economy will encounter many major bumps in the short term. Government regulation of the economy must be reduced, governmental

economic policy must become more consistent, the continual stream of labor problems must be brought under control, and Koreans must present a better environment for foreign investors if the rosy future is to be achieved. In addition, the education problem needs to be addressed, and the Seoul National University fixation needs to be remedied. If not, Seoul will continue to see an influx of families hoping to give their children a better chance of admission to the top four universities, and Korea will continue to see an outflow of gifted children to other countries with a more suitable educational environment. Correcting these problem will be extremely difficult, but not correcting them will be even more difficult, for Korea will never be able to achieve its future destiny as long as these problems continue to exist.

The discussions in this paper have great implications for both South Korea and the United States. The United States needs to come to grips with the changes in Korea, especially the views of younger Koreans and of the current Roh administration on relations with North Korea. Equally, current forces at play in Korea society are alienating the United States and will lead to drastic, and possibly unforeseen and unwanted, changes in the alliance that has existed between the two countries since the Korean War. While many may feel uncomfortable and fearful because of these changes, the changes themselves are natural for a country developing along the path to a mature democracy and cannot be reversed. The future lies in accepting the changes and putting them to use for a brighter future. The author hopes that his non-expert observations might provide some insights and lead to fruitful discussions of issues and areas not previously given in-depth consideration by the experts.

Endnotes:

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- ⁶ Bridget O'Brien and Yang Jun, "Queer Festival Brings Heartfelt Discussion," *The Korean Times*, July 1, 2004, <http://hankooki.com>.
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