

# Anti-Americanism in South Korea: From Structural Cleavages to Protest

Thomast Kern

This article was supported by the Korea Foundation.

## Abstract

This article maintains that recent anti-American protest waves in South Korea are rather driven by internal structural cleavages than by the behavior of the U.S. government. Anti-Americanism is considered as a "master frame" in order to link a broad range of different social interests and groups. In the first step, an outline of the problem definitions (diagnostic framing), solutions (prognostic framing) and the historical consciousness (memory framing) of the anti-American protest movement in South Korea is drawn. In the second step, structural cleavages in the subsystem of education, economy, politics and religion are described. It will be discussed, why different social groups take up a critical stance towards the United States. The conclusion is that the influence of the United States on the public opinion in South Korea is very limited, even if the U.S. government changes, for example, its political strategy towards North Korea. To some degree, anti-Americanism in South Korea appears to be independent of the U.S. policy.

Keywords: Anti-Americanism, protest movements, master frames, structural cleavages, mobilization

## Introduction

[As you will see, over the following two pages two words of "chapter" and "section" are employed as a demarcation unit, without consistency. Please clarify.]

Over recent years, the relationship between South Korea and the United States has changed dramatically. Today, strong criticism of the United States has become more and more popular within nearly all social strata. Not only the majority of the younger generation, but also intellectuals, members of the progressive political elite, established journalists, etc. ask for a fundamental change in the relationship between South Korea and the US. Many politicians and experts observe this development with growing concern (Kim 2002). They are worried that an ongoing disagreement could worsen the security situation.

This article starts with the basic assumption that anti-Americanism represents a collective "master frame" (Snow and Benford 1992; Gerhards and Rucht 1992) by which diverse actors of various social fields are connected in order to build an alliance. Their common opponents are not so much the United States, but the pro-American elite who controls access to influential positions in South Korean society. Therefore, anti-Americanism is inextricably linked with the distinctive pro-Americanism of the South Korean elite. Over decades, pro-Americanism has been the officially desired "public transcript" (Scott 1990) of social discourse, while anti-Americanism, as the "hidden transcript" of the dissidents, was banished to the backstage of the public arena. Against this background, the ongoing diffusion of anti-American sentiments indicates that, in recent years, power relations between the two competing camps have fundamentally changed.

The first [chapter](#) deals with the distinctive character of South Korean anti-Americanism. By referring to the concept of framing, which has "been applied most extensively to the substantive study of social movements and collective action" (Snow and Benford 2000, 612), the semantic dimensions of the growing protest movement are examined. [Chapter](#) two focuses on the structural causes of anti-Americanism. Regarding the results of the investigation, it seems that the phenomenon is triggered by strong competition between pro-American and anti-American forces, [driven by dynamics of](#) the social subsystems of education, politics, economy and religion. Chapter three offers a short summary of the central arguments.

## **The Framing of Anti-Americanism**

In the study of social movements, the linking of ideas and mobilization is usually conceptualized as a "framing process" (Snow et al. 1986; Oliver and Johnston 2000; Goffman 1977). Snow and Benford (2000, 614) define frames as an "action-oriented set of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization." The core tasks of framing include (1) the development of a problem diagnosis (diagnostic frame), (2) the proposal of an adequate solution (prognostic frame), (3) the employment of motivational strategies (motivational frame) for actual and potential sympathizers (Snow and Benford 2000, 615-618) and, in the temporal dimension, (4) the development of a collective memory (memory frame) (Kern 2003). Protest researchers often distinguish between conventional meaning frames and so called "master frames" (Snow and Benford 1992; Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Taylor 2000). While conventional frames refer to only one group or organization, master frames connect several collective actors with different interests. Although they serve the same function as conventional meaning frames, they are more general and include a broader range of problems:

Master frames are to movement-specific collective action frames as paradigms to finely tuned theories. [Master frames are generic, specific collective action frames are derivative](#) (Snow and Benford 1992, 138).

In the following, anti-Americanism in South Korea is reconstructed as a master frame. In the first [section](#), the problem definitions (diagnostic framing) and corresponding solutions (prognostic framing) proposed by the anti-American master frame are portrayed. In the second section, the collective memory (memory framing) of the movement is analyzed. The motivational framing of the protest movement will not be investigated, as the discussion of different motivation technologies would lead beyond the scope of this article. The subsequent [chapter](#) will examine how the anti-American master frame is connected with cleavage structures produced by institutional dynamics in the social subsystems of the South Korean society.

### *| Diagnostic and Prognostic Framing*

The diagnosis of the anti-American movement focuses on the power difference between the United States and South Korea. Generally, anti-Americanism, anti-Imperialism and anti-Japanism are very closely related. The core of this common worldview is based on the belief that the political

and economic institutions of South Korean society have been implemented by foreign powers in order to promote the realization of *their* interests in the region (Lee 1993, 17). Consequently, from an anti-American point of view, most conflicts in the South Korean postwar era are in one way or another connected with the structure of the American-Korean relationship:

Today's South Korean society is, in its fundamental nature, a neo-colonial society. . . .The principal contradiction that generates all other problems is the contradictory relationship between the U.S./Japan imperialism and the people of South Korea.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, a considerable part of the public is very sensitive to American intrusions, which are often perceived as an offence against South Korean sovereignty. Regarding the close interconnection and the power difference between the two countries, nearly every incident has the potential to lead to an explosion of anti-American sentiments. Against this background, the debate has especially focused on the SOFA, the changed North Korea policy of U.S. President George W. Bush, and the South Korean troop dispatch to Iraq.

#### 1) Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)

For decades, the dispute about jurisdiction over members of the U.S. military, in the case of criminal offences, frequently generated public protests against the US. For example, public outrage was triggered in 1962, when the shooting of two Korean wood workers by U.S. soldiers was reported. Thousands of students protested and demanded a bilateral treaty to regulate jurisdiction over soldiers in South Korea who committed crimes (Lee 1994, 131-132). The corresponding agreement was ratified in 1967. But because the South Korean courts had no jurisdiction over criminal U.S. soldiers, discontent among South Koreans was considerable. Therefore, after a short while, many of them asked for a "second SOFA" (Lee 1994, 132).

Even though the SOFA was revised in 1991 and 2001–now, in some cases, South Korean authorities are able to prosecute suspicious U.S. soldiers—many South Koreans still consider the arrangement as unfair. Over and above that, many criticize Korean authorities for voluntarily abdicating jurisdiction over criminal U.S. soldiers in many cases. A decisive landmark in public discourse about SOFA came in January 1992, after the reporting of a brutal murder of a Korean prostitute by a U.S. GI (Lee 1994, 289-293). In the course of the subsequent public outrage, the dispute about SOFA intensified dramatically. Student groups staged violent protests while businesses, such as Korean restaurants and taxis, boycotted members of the U.S. military. Some activists founded the "Joint Commission for Countermeasures" in order to investigate the murder case publicly. They organized press conferences, visited U.S. military bases and demanded a public apology from U.S. authorities.

In addition to violence against South Korean women, criticism is also directed to other fields, for example, the pollution on U.S. military bases or the illegal disposal of chemical substances into the Hangang river, which supplies the drinking water for Seoul. Another case of public outrage was triggered by the unintentional dropping of bombs on civil territory in May 2002,

---

<sup>1</sup> Kim Seong-bo, cit. in Lee (1993, 125).

where several citizens were injured and a number of houses seriously damaged. The latest protest of this sort occurred in the second half of 2002, when it was reported that a U.S. military vehicle had run over two schoolgirls. After a U.S. court found the two American drivers of the vehicle not guilty, tens of thousands engaged in candlelight demonstrations all over the country for weeks. The growing pressure of the public even forced President George W. Bush to announce his regrets over the incident. In addition, the demonstrations had a significant impact on the results of the presidential election in December 2002.

## 2) Changes in the U.S. Administration's North Korea Policy

Since President Bush's administration took office in 2001, the U.S. is more and more perceived as a primary obstacle in reconciliation with North Korea. The former president Kim Dae-jung's popular "sunshine policy," which peaked in the summit meeting with the North Korean head of state, Kim Jong Il, and was followed by several family reunions, exceeded by far anyone's expectations at that time. These events not only created the impression that the two Koreas already covered quite a distance toward a possible reunification, they also led many Koreans to hope for a life without the National Security Law or the omnipresent danger of a sudden war.

The change in the political climate also promoted a new evaluation of the security situation among many Koreans. Fewer and fewer South Koreans, especially in the younger generation, perceive North Korea as a threat to peace. In their view, the United States has become a main obstacle to a peaceful development on the Korean peninsula. President Bush's rejection of the sunshine policy and the "axis of evil" speech in January 2002 caused a great stir throughout the country. Therefore, the U.S. have been held responsible for the failing of further confidence-building measures between the two states and a reciprocal summit meeting in Seoul:

Perhaps for the first time in the South's political history, it appeared to many, particularly young Koreans, that the Americans were more threatening to their country than the communist threat from across the demilitarized zone (Cha 2003, 281).

Consequently, it appeared to many South Koreans that the U.S. is interested in maintaining the political status quo on the peninsula at all costs. Furthermore, after the nuclear weapons program of North Korea was revealed, rhetoric about a preemptive strike that ultimately would lead to a catastrophe caused a lot of worries. Especially "the announcement that the United States would pull back its troops from the DMZ to rear positions on the peninsula" (Cha 2003, 282) nurtured these fears. The anti-American protest wave and the candlelight demonstrations in 2002 were highly shaped by this perception of U.S. policy.

## 3) Troop Dispatch to Iraq

With the dispatch of more than 3,000 soldiers—by which South Korea currently provides the third largest troop contingent after Great Britain and the United States—the war in Iraq became the object of strong anti-American protests. Already the candlelight demonstrations during the impeachment

against President Roh had been shaped by criticism of the war.<sup>2</sup> But when the kidnapping and murder of the Korean translator Kim Seon-il became known in June 2004, the protests reached their temporary peak. The criticism was mostly directed--from the protestors' point of view--at Korea's lack of autonomy from the US. A coalition of more than 350 civic groups demanded that the Korean government withdraw the plans for a troop dispatch. These groups announced that the participation of South Korean soldiers in the war in Iraq was not in the national interest and condemned the U.S. military action as an "immoral imperialist war, especially in the light of recent prison abuse scandals."<sup>3</sup> The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions demanded "that the Korean government not play puppet to the foreign policies of the United States and that it take a firm stance against it, and that it protect the rights and the [life of its citizens](#)."<sup>4</sup>

### | *Memory Framing*

From the anti-American activist's point of view, current problems in the relationship between the United States and South Korea are only the newest link in a long historical chain of disappointments. The criticism of the United States is based, to a great extent, on a negative interpretation of historical experiences that are systematically selected from a historical stream of occurrences. By emphasizing individual "negative" historical events, the impression of a steadily recurring historical pattern emerges, in which the US, for the benefit of their own national interest, repeatedly lets Korea down. Therefore, the death of the two schoolgirls, the pollution problem on U.S. military bases and the rejection of the sunshine policy by the Bush administration seem to be a repetition of the same theme.

This section deals with the main events in the "memory frame" (Kern 2003; Schwartz 1996) of the anti-American movement. It has to be pointed out that this memory frame is not fully shared by the general public; a large number of Koreans show either opposition or indifference. However, elements of this historical framework regularly appear in the public discourse. The most important key events which are included in the memory frame of the anti-American movement are the U.S. occupation of South Korea from 1945 to 1948, the division of Korea, the military suppression of the Gwangju demonstrations in 1980 and the so called IMF crisis in 1997.

#### 1) U.S. Occupation (1945-1948)

Many Koreans are convinced that the United States committed their "original sin" in South Korea, when they installed a pro-American government against the will of a vast majority of the population. When the U.S. troops landed in September 1945 on the peninsula, they had to deal with the so-called "Korean Peoples' Republic" (KPR). This organization was led by former Korean independence activists who took power after the capitulation of the Japanese in August 1945. Until September, they had organized a dense network of "peoples' committees" (PC) all over the country. These PCs "preserved the peace and collected taxes, preventing looting, bloodshed, and

---

<sup>2</sup> *Korea Herald*, March 28, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> *Korea Herald*, June 10, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> *KCTU Statement* (June 23, 2004) at [www.kctu.org](http://www.kctu.org).

rioting. Some PCs even took a census, assembled other vital statistics, and had armed defense units, posing a threat to military government" (Shin 1994, 1604). But from the U.S. military government's point of view, the KPR was too far left. It suspected the Soviets to be the secret force behind the KPR, seeking to bring the whole peninsula under the influence of communism.

Accordingly, the U.S. military government started a campaign against the PCs and the farmer unions, and labeled their members as communists without paying attention to the considerable ideological differences among them. In addition, it revitalized the police apparatus of the former Japanese colonial administration with the purpose of imposing its authority on the whole country (Shin 1994, 1604). In the following years, frequent violent collisions occurred. The peak of this development was the suppression of rebellions on Jeju Island and in the Yeosu region in 1948 with a high number of civil casualties. Ever since then, many Koreans hold the United States partly responsible for these incidents. From this perspective, the United States occupation of the Korean peninsula is perceived not as liberation, but as an expression of U.S. imperialism.

## 2) The Division of Korea

After the U.S.-Soviet joint commission was broken off in September 1947 without providing a road map to Korean reunification, the U.S. government handed the question over to the United Nations. The General Assembly adopted a U.S. resolution to establish a U.N. Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCK) in order to observe the election for a National Assembly. As the soviet military administration of North Korea did not recognize the establishment of the UNTCK, the UN approved general elections in May 1948 only in the south. The majority of the Korean people rejected this plan, because they feared the final division of their country. Even though moderate political leaders like Kim Gu or Kim Gyu-sik demanded the withdrawal of all foreign troops before national elections were held, nobody listened to them. Only the conservative faction around Syngman Rhee supported the plan. From an "anti-American" point of view, many Koreans therefore conclude:

An overwhelming number of rightists were elected to the new national assembly, and Syngman Rhee became the first President or "father" of the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Clearly, Rhee was 'America's man' from the beginning of the American occupation. . . . Although President Rhee was an adroit manipulator, he was not popular. Without American soldiers and money and South Korean police he could not have kept his regime in power (Lee 1994, 95).

From the very beginning, the new government had a serious legitimacy problem, and it took years before it was firmly in the saddle. Many critics of the U.S. were certain that the division was pushed through one-sidedly by the U.S. government in order to contain the advance of communism on the Korean peninsula. In their view, the United States is mainly responsible for the Korean War (1950-1953) and the division of the peninsula.

## 3) Suppression of the Gwangju Demonstrations (1980)

Many Koreans consider the violent suppression of the Gwangju demonstrations (An 2002; Scott-Stokes and Lee 2000) in 1980 by the military government a key event in the emergence of anti-Americanism in South

Korea. The disturbances in the capital of the southeastern province (Jeollanam-do), began on March 18 with street demonstrations and lasted for 10 days until the protests were brutally suppressed by the military. Under the military agreement between Washington and Seoul, a considerable part of the South Korean army was under the command of a U.S. general. Therefore, many Koreans remain convinced that the U.S. government was in collusion with the military suppression of the demonstrations (Clark 1988).

#### 4) IMF Crisis

The sudden collapse of the South Korean financial system in 1997 was traumatic for many Koreans. The country, which stood on the brink of economic ruin, urgently relied on financial backup from outside. But the U.S.-dominated International Monetary Fund (IMF) demanded, in return for aid, painful reforms on the part of the South Korean government. This was widely perceived as a sellout of political and economic sovereignty. At that time, a large majority of the population generally objected to foreigners taking possession of Korean properties or industries. Nevertheless, under the dictate of the IMF, import restrictions had to be cut back, management structures reorganized and unprofitable companies closed down. As a consequence, many large foreign companies acquired parts of South Korean industry very cheaply, and many employees and workers lost their pensions. Many Koreans, especially labor unions, blamed, in large part, the economic imperialism of the US.

### **Structural Cleavages**

Throughout this paper, it has been made clear that anti-Americanism in South Korea has a long tradition. But despite that, the country was one of the most reliable allies of the United States for decades. It was ruled by a pro-American and anti-Communist elite (Cumings 1981, 1990), whose power highly depended on the military, economic and political support of the U.S. Therefore, influential position holders were close allies of the United States. In public discourse, the Korean-American friendship was sacrosanct and every criticism was punished as a violation against the current rules of political correctness. This might be one reason why, on the contrary, anti-Americanism became the common denominator of all dissident groups who rejected the dominating establishment.

The structural causes of this conflict are examined below, starting with the institutional setting of South Korean society. This paper demonstrates that structural antagonisms in different institutional areas, like education, politics, economy and religion, are the sources from which South Korean anti-Americanism attracts its sympathizers. In the educational arena, the conflict is driven by the fact that top social positions are mainly only available to those who receive their bachelor's degrees from elite South Korean universities and doctoral degrees from American universities. In the political arena, the recent power struggle between the elitist establishment and the participatory political forces of civil society has caused a major rearrangement of the political landscape. In the economic arena, the unequal distribution of costs and benefits in connection with the globalization of the economy has led to resistance by those who feel disadvantaged by the opening of the South Korean markets. In the religious arena, especially among Christian

churches, a deep ditch between liberal and orthodox forces has stimulated a controversial interpretation of the Korean-American relationship.

In the context of these structural antagonisms, both camps use anti-Americanism and pro-Americanism as "master frames" in order to mobilize potential sympathizers and weaken their opponents. Regarding these diverse institutional arenas, it appears that anti-Americanism is essentially the cultural code of the structurally marginalized forces.

### *Educational Competition*

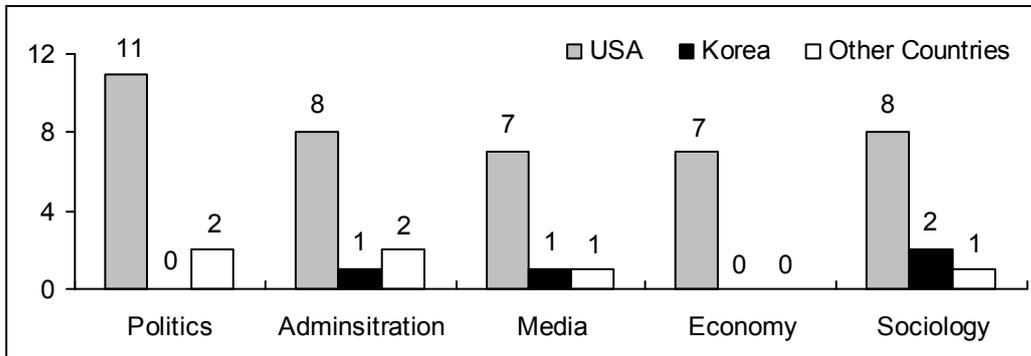
During the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910), Korea was ruled by an intellectual elite, whose social rank was higher than that of the military. All high officials were educated in famous Confucian academies and passed the appropriate examinations. Although the membership of the upper class was practically inherited, for centuries, the selection of high-ranking officials was determined by the educational system. Consequently, the reproduction of the social structure relied heavily on education. It came close to a social revolution, then, when the U.S. military government abolished all educational restrictions from colonial rule. Now, every citizen seemed to have the opportunity to climb up the social ladder by means of educational success. Therefore, the South Korean education system has since expanded enormously: not only quantitatively, by including more and more students (MOE 2004), but also qualitatively, by systematically improving the educational output (OECD 2003).

Today, one of the most distinctive features of the South Korean educational system is its elitism. The occupational opportunities of students who graduate from famous universities like Seoul National University or Yonsei University are excellent. In addition, children of wealthy families often complete their educational efforts with a doctoral degree at a U.S. university. As a consequence, a degree from a South Korean elite university in combination with an educational socialization in the United States has become one of the most important secondary qualities for a successful career. Nearly all top positions in politics, economics, education or science are occupied by people who graduated from well-known South Korean universities and studied for several years in the United States. The career opportunities of those who cannot afford such expansive studies in the United States are not as good, even though their qualification might be equal. In short, a degree from an American university has become valuable cultural capital in the exclusion of other social groups from access to the top positions in Korean society.

The selection of professors at leading South Korean universities is an illustrative example. In South Korea, professors are traditionally one of the most reputable occupational groups as they exert enormous influence on media, politics and economics. Figure 1 offers an overview of the countries where professors in the departments of politics, administration, media, economy and sociology at Yonsei University received their Ph.D. On the whole (see Figure 2), 81 percent of all professors received their Ph.D. in the United States, 7 percent in South Korea and 12 percent in other countries. This means that access to top academic positions at elite universities is nearly exclusively reserved for professors who received their Ph.D. in the US. On the contrary, Ph.D.s that are "Made in Korea" play only a minor role. Usually these academics have to compensate for their lack of an American degree with other kinds of studies in the United States. Ph.D.s from other

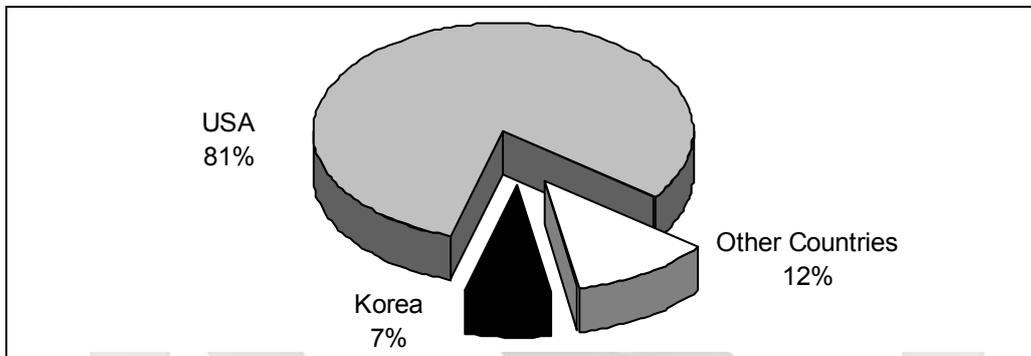
countries promise slightly better career opportunities than Ph.D.s "Made in Korea," but their importance is also a minor one.

Figure 1. Doctorate of Yonsei Professors by Country and Department



Source: Yonsei University, [www.yonsei.ac.kr](http://www.yonsei.ac.kr), accessed on November 5, 2003.

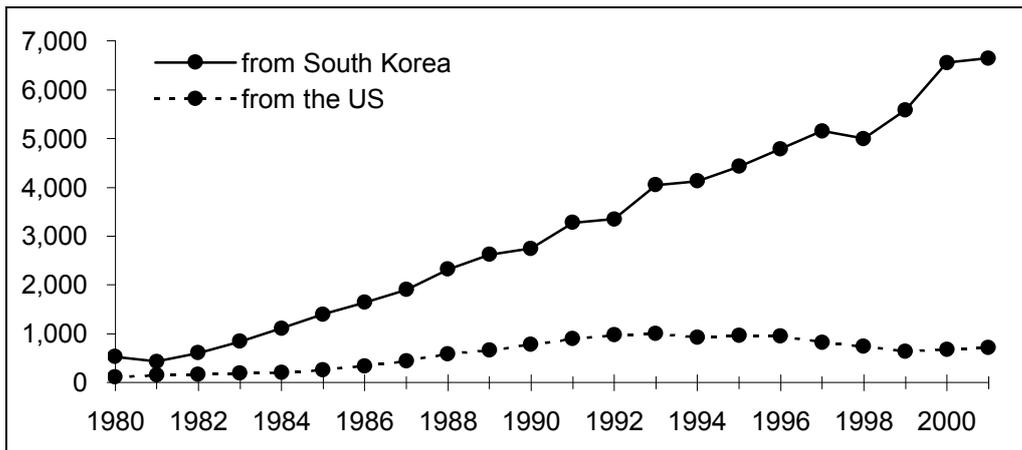
Figure 2 Doctorate of Yonsei Professors by Country (all examined departments)



Source: Yonsei University, [www.yonsei.ac.kr](http://www.yonsei.ac.kr), accessed on 05.11.2003.

This example illustrates that an American doctorate contributes greatly to the improvement of occupational opportunities. This applies not only to universities but also to companies and governmental institutions. However, due to the expansion of the education system, the number of highly qualified "Made in Korea" academics has dramatically increased over recent years. According to Figure 3, the number of South Korean Ph.D.s has grown steadily since the 1980s, while the number of American Ph.D.s has remained stagnant. Paradoxically, because of their ever-increasing growth, the Korean Ph.D.s seem to decrease in value while the distinctiveness of American Ph.D.s increases relatively: in 1981, for example, there was one "Made in USA" Ph.D. for every three Korean competitors, followed by four in 1990 and nearly ten in 2000. This indicates a growing structural cleavage among educated elites.

Figure 3. Doctorates of South Koreans (1980–2001)



Source: Educational Statistic System, [www.std.re.kr](http://www.std.re.kr), accessed on November 13, 2003.

What does this have to do with anti-Americanism? Cleavages among elites play an important role in the mobilization of social protests (Goldstone 1991, 38). As they have relatively more resources at their disposal, their participation is crucial in order to form a critical mass for protests (Oliver et al. 1985, 524; Granovetter 1978). Accordingly, the exclusion of a vast majority of the educated elite from leading positions of the Korean society generates an incentive structure that eases the diffusion of anti-American sentiments and the mobilization of protests. This assumption corresponds to poll results that indicate that antipathy toward the United States is particularly strong among higher educated Koreans (see Table 1).

Table 1: Attitudes toward the U.S. by Education

(Unit: %)

Question	Middle School Graduates	High School Graduates	College Graduates & above
Which country do you like the most? (Answer: United States)	33.5	16.2	14.7
Which country do you like the least? (Answer: United States)	7.2	21.8	31.7
Which country is the most threatening to South Korea? (Answer: United States)	12.3	26.5	31.1
Do you have feeling of amity toward the US?	70.5	51.8	40.8
Do you have feeling of criticism toward the US?	29.1	47.5	59.1

Source: September 2003 *JoongAng Ilbo* – CSIS – RAND Polls, Survey 1, in: Mitchell (2004, 131-146).

Against this background, anti-American protests in South Korea are only partially an expression of widespread individual discontent with the United States. With respect to the cleavage between the "haves" and the "have-nots" of a U.S. university degree, anti-Americanism seems to be a movement toward the devaluation of the "cultural capital" (Bourdieu 1992) that is monopolized by a small part of the South Korean establishment and the opening of top social positions for the new home-grown educational elite.

## *Participatory versus Elite Democracy*

Recently, the surprising victories of political outsider Roh Moo-hyun in the presidential election of December 2002 and of the Uri Party in the parliamentary election of April 2004 showed that the political landscape of South Korea is going through a dramatic change. President Roh is not a member of the so-called "gentlemen's club" (Song 2003, 2) of the South Korean establishment. Therefore, he lacks all necessary attributes, including for example, noble descent from a rich and reputable family or the obligatory degree from a famous university, to say nothing of a U.S. doctoral degree. However, he succeeded on these same bases in distinguishing himself as a proper alternative to the dominant political establishment, and especially mobilized those voters who distrust institutional politics.

Traditionally, the South Korean political system has been characterized by two factors: (1) Political mobilization is shaped more by regional conflicts between the Southeast (Yeongnam) and the Southwest (Honam) than by economic and religious class membership. Until recently, the Grand National Party (GNP) had its power base in the southeast, while the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP), before it was defeated in the election of April 2004, drew its supporters from the southwest. (2) In general, political power is concentrated in the hands of a few charismatic leaders who make decisions about political programs and the distribution of positions among party members. Because of this, political newcomers are highly dependent on the support of the party leaders. As a result, the internal conditions of South Korean parties have not been favorable to the creation of a democratic culture that enables party members to freely debate controversial political issues (Koellner 2002).

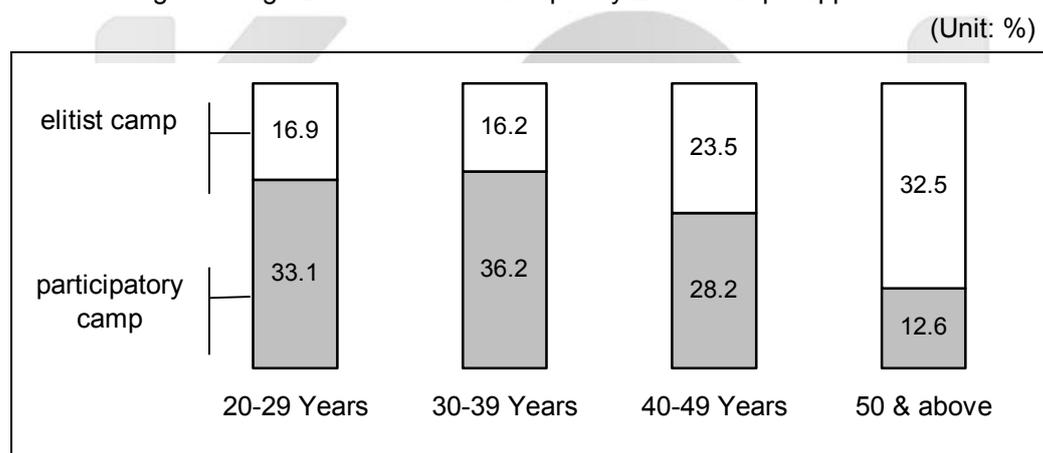
The elitism within the political establishment emerged under the authoritarian postwar regimes and shaped South Korean political culture for decades. In this context the claim of moral superiority by the upper class, which can be seen as an enduring heritage of the Confucian tradition, plays an important role. In the past, the establishment derived legitimacy for its rule firstly from its leading role in the process of cultural, social and economic modernization and secondly from its protective function against the North Korean enemy. On the one hand, according to this traditional understanding, the upper class has to set a good example for ordinary people in a pedagogical sense, to care for them in a paternalistic sense and to be the forerunner in living a modern lifestyle. On the other hand, the common people are expected to remain committed to subordination, obedience and loyalty.

Although the traditional establishment dominated the political culture for decades, its elitism was constantly challenged by the democracy movement. The political discourse of the 1970s and 1980s was strongly influenced by competition between two different concepts of legitimization. The first concept was "rule from above"; the second, "rule from below." Although the democracy movement achieved a decisive breakthrough in 1987 with constitutional reform, the political culture did not change fundamentally, as the democratic reforms only concerned the institutional framework of the political order. Meanwhile, political parties have still been fixed on the concept of "rule from above":

Generally, it can be concluded, that the political parties of Korea are still dominated by individual leaders (keyword: "bossism"), a hierarchical internal organization, a distinctive factionalism within the party, regional rootedness and strongly restricted participatory opportunities for the party basis (Köllner 2002, 8).

Consequently, the basic idea of "rule from below"—i.e. political participation of the broad population—is still a primary concern for many civil society activists, while political elitism is regarded as a feature of the traditional establishment. The supporters of the participatory camp (*jinbo*) typically incorporate all the characteristics that are strongly rejected by the supporters of the elitist camp (*bosu*): positive attitude toward the sunshine policy, rejection of the National Security Law, support for concepts of distributive equality, rejection of regionalism, criticism of the war in Iraq and a skeptical attitude toward the United States. According to a survey of the Korea Social Science Data Center for the weekly magazine *The Hankyoreh 21* in 2004, 27.9 percent of the respondents sympathized consistently with the participatory camp, while 22.0 percent corresponded to the elitist camp. The typical supporter of the participatory camp is around 30 years old, male and has a university education. The typical supporter of the elitist camp is 50 years or older, female and holds no university degree.

Figure 4. Age Distribution of Participatory/Elitist Camp Supporters



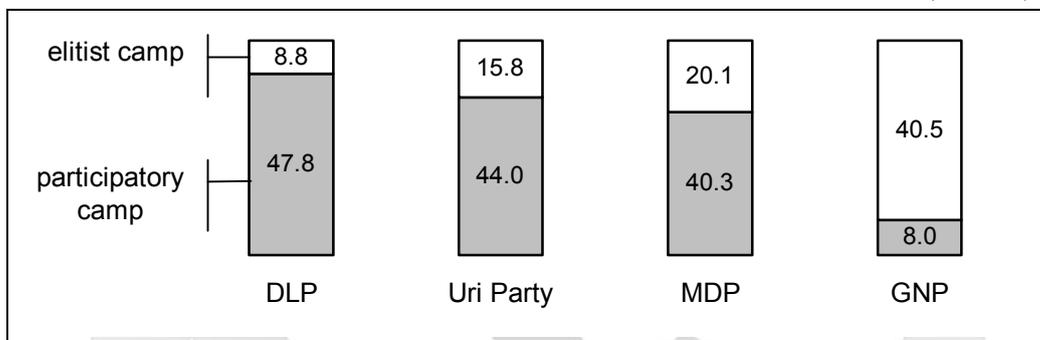
Source: *The Hankyoreh 21*, October 3, 2004..

Until the December 2002 presidential election, civil society was dominated by the participatory camp, while the institutionalized party system remained largely under the control of the elitist camp (Choe 2000). In practical terms, both sectors seemed to be closed shops. In spring 2002, this rigid order showed its first fissures when the governing Millennium Democratic Party (MDP), pressured by bad poll results, decided to choose its presidential candidate based on the model of the U.S. primary election. Accordingly, party members and citizens were allowed to participate in the selection process, which had so far been controlled by a charismatic party leader. The new nomination system turned out to be a great success in mobilizing supporters. The participatory camp reacted especially enthusiastically. When the outsider, Roh Moo-hyun, won the ticket instead of the candidate endorsed by the influential party establishment, the whole party went through a difficult crisis. Over the ensuing months, Roh's opponents within the MDP unsuccessfully campaigned against him to try to make him abandon his presidential candidacy.

During his election campaign, which had a strong undertone of criticism of the US, Roh Moo-hyun succeeded in winning over the young voters who support the participatory camp (see Figure 4). In contrast, his opponent, Yi Hoe-chang of the GNP, used every opportunity to label the MDP candidate as "left-leaning" and anti-American in order to mobilize the voters who sympathize with the elitist camp. By doing so, both sides successfully referred to the political preferences of their sympathizers. Soon after the election was decided, the conflict between the two camps was transferred to the parliament where the oppositional GNP held the majority of the seats. In summer 2003, Roh Moo-hyun and his supporters, who included only a minority of the influential party members, caused a great stir when they tried to transform the MDP into a programmatic party with a focus on participation. After an unsuccessful discussion of reform, Roh's sympathizers split off and founded the Uri Party, which quickly became the leading political force of the participatory camp (see figure 5).

Figure 5. Party Preferences of Participatory/Elitist Camp Supporters

(Unit: %)



Source: *The Hankyoreh 21*, October 3, 2004.

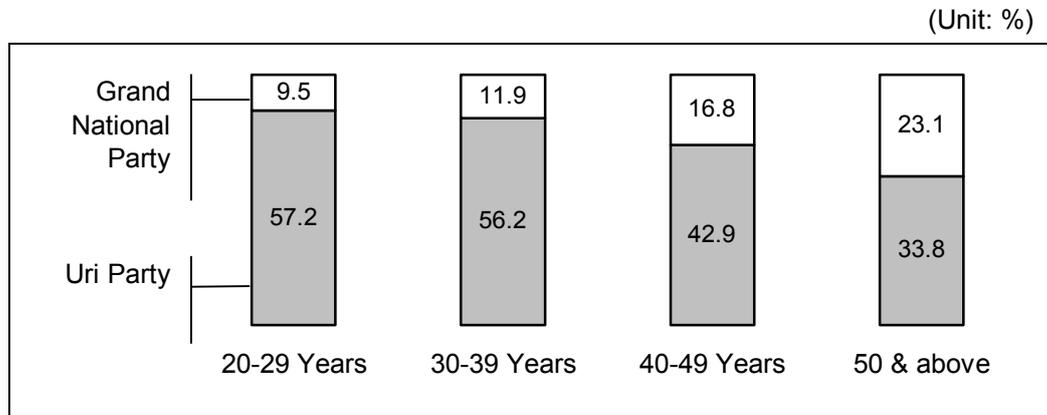
While, until 2002, the programmatic differences between the established parties were minor (Köllner 2002, 20), in the parliamentary election of 2004, voters suddenly had to choose between distinct alternatives.<sup>5</sup> According to a survey conducted by *The Hankyoreh 21*, the Grand National Party was regarded as the most distinct representative of the elitist camp with an average value of 1.86—based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strong elitist orientation (*bosu*), 5 = strong participatory orientation (*jinbo*)). The Millennium Democratic Party, with a value of 2.09, was considered only slightly less elitist. But at the same time, the Uri Party achieved a distinct participatory value of 3.50, surpassing even the small Democratic Labor Party (DLP) (with a value of 3.47), which is widely labeled as "radical".

In conclusion, the Uri Party seems to attract especially those—often young—voters who did not previously respond to the established parties, which are largely perceived as elitist. In a Gallup survey (Gallup-Korea 2002), 56.4 percent of the 20-29 year age group stated that none of the existing parties met their ideological expectations. In the 30-39 year age group, the corresponding share was 47.7 percent; and in the 40-49 year age group, it was 45.6 percent. But in the 50 years and above age group, only 31.8

<sup>5</sup> Even though the Democratic Labor Party (DLP) can be viewed as a stronghold of the participatory camp, its lack of seats in the national assembly—at least up until the parliamentary election of April 2004—it was not considered to be one of the established parties.

percent were ideologically discontent with the established parties. On the contrary, nowadays—as figure 6 shows—the Uri Party is mainly supported by younger voters, while the GNP is the stronghold of older voters. This distribution corresponds largely to the stronger criticism of the United States found primarily among the younger generation (see Table 2).

Figure 5. Preferences for the Uri Party and the GNP by Age



Source: Gallup-Korea (2004).

Table 2. Attitudes toward the U.S. by Age

(Unit: %)

Question	20s	30s	40s	50s & above
Which country do you like the most? (Answer: United States)	11.3	6.2	15.1	38.8
Which country do you like the least? (Answer: United States)	35.4	34.9	20.2	5.3
Which country is the most threatening to South Korea? (Answer: United States)	38.1	31.2	27.1	9.8
Do you have feelings of amity toward the US?	36.9	41.5	45.4	73.2
Do you have feelings of criticism toward the US?	62.4	58.5	53.9	26.5

Source: September 2003 *JoongAng Ilbo* – CSIS – RAND Polls, Survey 1, in: Mitchell (2004, 131-146).

The election of Roh Moo-hyun caused a political landslide within the South Korean party system. The political establishment, which has been dominated by elitism and regionalism, was forced to go on the defensive. The results of the parliamentary elections in April 2004 support this. Even though regionalism is still very strong, it seems to be eroding. Instead, ideological preferences are becoming more and more important. The parliamentary impeachment against President Roh, which was initiated by the elite-oriented parties, accelerated this process considerably. Therefore, the growth of anti-American sentiments seems to be, for the most part, a product of increasing tensions between the participatory and the elitist camp in the political arena.

### Globalization and Protectionism

South Korea's economic dependency on the U.S. market seems to be a third reason for the growing criticism of the US. As the South Korean balance of

trade improved more and more in the 1980s, the United States increased their pressure to open South Korean markets, especially in agricultural products. The Korean government formally conceded to this request in many fields, but still tried, by imposing hidden transaction costs and legal obstacles, to make the market entrance for U.S. companies as difficult as possible. Subsequently, the United States threatened Korea with sanctions and demanded—for example, via the "1988 Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act"—open access to South Korean markets.

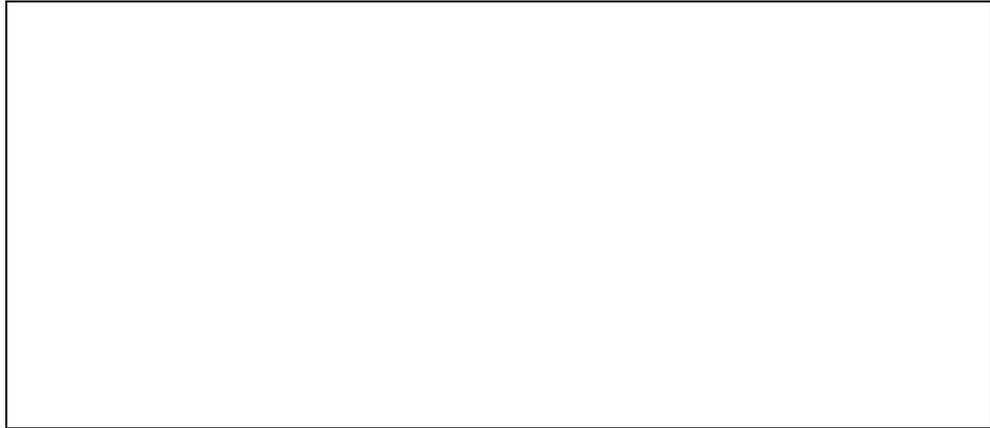
### 1) Trade Policy

The most disputed area has been agriculture. South Korean farmers worry about dramatic income loss if U.S. products, like beef, soybeans or rice, are to be imported to South Korea without any restrictions. A typical example was the conflict over the import of U.S. tobacco products at the end of the 1980s. Until 1987 the South Korean government held a monopoly on the production of cigarettes. Traditionally the planting of tobacco was a lucrative additional income for Korean farmers, partially because of extensive exports to the US. When the American government increased its pressure on the South Korean government in order to open this market, farmers and students protested violently (Ortiz 1999): The farmers perceived the United States as an unfair trade partner who protects its own farmers even while demanding complete liberalization of the South Korean market.

In the early 1990s, as the South Korean trade balance developed negatively due to the dramatic increase of foreign imports, the government started a campaign against the "excessive consumption" of luxury goods from abroad. Similar campaigns had taken place earlier. But this time, it was leveled directly against the increase in foreign imports. The consumption of foreign products was labeled as unpatriotic, and foreign actors were no longer allowed to appear in TV commercials. Occurrences like these led again and again to disruptions in the relationship between South Korea and the U.S.

### 2) IMF Crisis

The economic tensions within South Korea worsened when the Kim Young-sam administration abandoned the former policy of "economic nationalism" (Ortiz 1999) and started a campaign to adapt the South Korean economy to the internationally accepted standards of the world markets. Over the course of this new policy, export-oriented industries benefited while farmers, protected by the government for years, had to struggle with the new regulations. In 1995, South Korea achieved entrance into the OECD. Shortly after this, the so-called "IMF crisis" followed in 1997 with a more than twofold growth of the unemployment rate within the space of a few months and the financial ruin of many Korean middle class families.



During the "IMF-crisis," the economic climate in South Korea worsened dramatically. For example, the number of labor conflicts increased: While from 1995 to 1997, the annual number of strikes varied between 78 and 88, this number increased in 1998 to 129 and in 1999 to 198. At that time, anti-American slogans were widespread. Trade unions in particular criticized the U.S.-dominated IMF. Furthermore, not only the number but also the intensity of labor conflicts increased: from 1995 to 1997, on average, 576.763 working days per year were lost. The corresponding value for 1998 was 1,452,096 working days, and in 1999, 1,366.281 working days were lost, which was approximately three times higher than before.

### 3) Past Labor Policy

In the past, besides the trade relations with the US, the repressive labor policy of the authoritarian regimes in the 1970s and 1980s was also a cause for anti-American protests. The memory of the repressive labor policy is still very vivid, especially among trade unionists, and exerts a strong influence on the debate over globalization. From the perspective of "third world theory," which was very popular at that time, the awful working conditions in South Korea, particularly in the light industries, were considered part of a global exploitation structure benefiting American consumers. According to this approach, the low wages and awful working conditions in the periphery depended on power differences between the so-called First and Third World.

Furthermore, U.S. companies benefited from the repressive labor policy of the authoritarian regimes. For example, in the "free export zones", which were implemented by the Korean government to attract foreign investors, the company management and the police consulted every day in order to prevent the unionization of the workers (Ogle 1990, 60). In case of illegal demonstrations or strikes, the police usually intervened brutally. Therefore, the public usually reacted very sensitively when, for example in the case of the U.S. company "Control Data" in 1982, management fired union leaders during a strike.<sup>6</sup>

There are also cases involving Korean or U.S. companies where management fled to the United States to escape prosecution without paying the outstanding wages of their workers. A well-known example is the YH Trading Co. in 1979, whose Korean owner cleared off to the United States with all his money shortly before his company went bankrupt (CISJD 1981).

---

<sup>6</sup> *Korea Times*, July 22, 1982.

At that time, the protest held by the fired workers nearly brought the Park regime to an end. Another example was the U.S. electronics firm "Pico Korea" in 1990, whose management fled to the US, likewise without paying outstanding wages to their staff (Liem and Kim 1992). Such incidents attracted the nationwide attention of the public. These incidents gave many people—particularly labor activists—the impression that the United States was the real "wire puller" behind the repressive labor conditions in South Korea:

Most Koreans still believe that the Korean government acts in one line with whatever trade policies the United States demands and, [that as such the government acts no more than like a puppet of the United States](#) (Ortiz 1999, 58).

### | *Liberalism und Orthodoxy*

Hardly any aspect of South Korean society is more influenced by the "American way of life" than religion. After the opening of Korea in the late nineteenth century, the first protestant missionaries entered the country. Most of them came from the United States, some from Canada and Australia. Under their influence, Protestantism became one of the most important religions on the northeastern Asian peninsula in just a few decades. In 2005, Protestants equaled 21.6 percent of the population; Catholics, 8.2 percent (Gallup-Korea 2005b). As a consequence, Christianity constituted the largest organized religion in South Korea with nearly 30 percent of the population claiming membership.

Although South Korean Protestantism seems chaotic, due to the many divisions among Presbyterians, most churches and groups can be assigned to one of three different categories: (1) The first category consists of traditional Evangelicals who are primarily interested in individual salvation and stand for a more conservative theology. (2) The second category consists of Pentecostals who share an interest in individual salvation with the Evangelicals, but differ in their spirituality. (3) The third type consists of Liberals who are characterized by a combination of liberal theology and social engagement. They usually emphasize democracy, human rights and social justice. The first two categories, the Evangelicals and Pentecostals—referred to in the following as the "orthodox" camp—represent the large majority of South Korean Protestants. They share the characteristics of anti-Communism and missionary enthusiasm, combined with an often literal interpretation of the Bible. The third category, liberal Protestants, differ from the orthodox camp mainly in their theological understanding of salvation, which includes not only individuals but the whole society. Usually, the relationship between the orthodox and the liberal camp is a highly tense one: In their sermons, orthodox clerics regularly curse North Korea, Communism, and liberal theology. From their point of view, liberals with their social reform orientation are in dangerous proximity to "anti-Christian" Communists. On the contrary, liberal theologians criticize "fundamentalist" theology, the spiritual spectacle, ignorance for the socially deprived, and the swelling religious commerce among orthodox churches.

In recent history, both camps showed a strong record of fierce controversies regarding anti-Americanism. Especially in the 1980s and 1990s, pastors and priests of the liberal camp released several public statements that were critical toward the United States, while the orthodox camp reacted

with sharp rejections. The first climax of this dispute occurred after the arson attack on the U.S. cultural center in Busan in 1982. Soon after the incident, a group of leading priests and pastors of the pro-democracy movement published a statement in which they sharply attacked the U.S. policy toward South Korea.<sup>7</sup> The state-controlled media and many social organizations instantly reacted with indignation. Two days later, the orthodox Korean Christian Leaders Association also published a statement in which they condemned the attitude of the liberals and accused them of being "impure elements" and possible sympathizers with North Korea. The debate went on for several days.

In the following years, liberal Protestants and Catholics were regularly involved in boycotts against foreign products and, until now, they played a leading role in the protests against the "Status of Forces Agreement" (SOFA) and exerted a strong influence on the participatory camp and the media. Although they again and again attract the attention of the public because of their spectacular appearance and their high reputation, their number remains relatively small. On the contrary, orthodox Protestants emerge more and more as a major force in pro-American and anti-North Korean protest campaigns. As current poll results indicate, more than half of all Korean Protestants (52.5 percent) describe themselves as *Bosu*, which means that they sympathize with the "elitist camp."<sup>8</sup> An illustrative example of the growing political activism of the orthodox camp was the "anti-USFK withdrawal, anti-nuclear weapons, anti-Kim Jong Il, pro-unification rally"<sup>9</sup> held at city hall in Seoul on 1 March 2003 with approximately 100,000 participants. Most of the participants were Protestant church members. A similar event had already occurred at the beginning of 2003, shortly after the election of President Roh Moo-hyun. One of the most important organizers of these demonstrations was the Christian Council of Korea, which includes 62 orthodox denominations as members. It is the largest Protestant umbrella organization in the country.

## Conclusion

In this article, it has been made clear that the spreading of anti-Americanism in South Korea is closely connected with structural dynamics in the institutional setting of South Korean society. This has been shown through four examples: 1) As a consequence of the expansion of the education system, an academic elite, which is "Made in Korea," is demanding equal access to leading positions within South Korean society. 2) Following the democratization of the political system, the participatory forces of civil society are increasingly intruding into political institutions, which, until now, have been a stronghold for the elitist camp. 3) As a result of economic globalization, the gap between the supporters and opponents of protectionism is growing deeper and deeper. 4) With the expansion of Christianity, theologically liberal forces emerged in the 1970s as leading critics of the elitist camp. Today, however, the orthodox Protestant mainstream constitutes the leading force of the pro-American counter-

---

<sup>7</sup> *Korea Times*, April 20, 1982.

<sup>8</sup> Gallup-Korea (2005a, see chapt. 0).

<sup>9</sup> *Digital Chosun ilbo*, February 25, 2003.

mobilization. The conflict between the two camps is not only shaped by political, but also by deep-rooted theological differences.

Structural cleavages within the institutional setting of South Korean society are a driving force behind the growing sympathy for anti-American attitudes. Over the course of social transformation, anti-Americanism emerged as the ideology of the marginalized, while the establishment traditionally took a pro-American stance. Until now, South Korean social order was largely based on pro-Americanism and anticommunism, while anti-Americanism was carried by the forces of cultural change. As such, anti-Americanism directly aims at the devaluation of the dominant ideology and challenges the rule of the current establishment.

What is the conclusion? At first glance, anti-American protests in South Korea seem to be an expression of general discontent with U.S. politics. However, as mentioned before, they are instead the result of a power struggle driven by antagonistic cleavages within the societal subsystems of South Korea. Consequently, the United States has only a limited influence on the anti-American atmosphere in South Korea, regardless of whether the American government changes its political strategy toward North Korea or approves a fundamental revision of SOFA. Thus, it seems that anti-Americanism is only loosely connected with the actual behavior of the United States government. It can be concluded, then, that if the international situation keeps stable in the meantime, the critical attitude of many South Koreans will hardly change as long as the described domestic social tensions remain effective.

## REFERENCES

- Ahn, Jong-cheol. 2002. "The Significance of Settling the Past of the December 12 Coup and the May 18 Gwangju Uprising." *Korea Journal* 42.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1992. *Homo Academicus*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Cha, Victor. 2003. "America and South Korea: The Ambivalent Alliance?" *Current History* 102.
- Choe, Jang-jip. 2000. "Democratization, Civil Society, and the Civil Social Movement in Korea: The Significance of the Citizens' Alliance for the 2000." *Korea Journal* 40.
- Christian Institute of Social Justice and Democracy (CISJD). 1981. *Presence of Christ among Minjung. Introduction to the UIM in Korea*. Seoul: Christian Institute for the Study of Justice and Development.
- Clark, Donald N., ed. 1988. *The Kwangju Uprising: Shadows over the Regime in South Korea*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Cummings, Bruce. 1981. *Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945-1947*. Vol. 1 of *The Origins of the Korean War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. *The Origins of the Korean War. The Roaring of the Cataract, 1947-1950*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gallup-Korea. 2002. "Gungmin uisik josa 6" (Survey of the Peoples' Consciousness 6). [www.gallup.co.kr/news/index\\_2002.html](http://www.gallup.co.kr/news/index_2002.html).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. "Tanhaek jeonggug--chongseon yeoron josa." (Impeachment: Survey on the Occasion of the Parliamentary Election) [www.gallup.co.kr/news/index\\_2004.html](http://www.gallup.co.kr/news/index_2004.html).

- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005a. "Daehyeong gyohoe seonho julgo ihon chonseong neureo." (Preference for Megachurches Declines, Acceptance of Divorce Increases). [www.gallup.co.kr/News/2005a/release003.html](http://www.gallup.co.kr/News/2005a/release003.html).
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005b. "Hanguk gyohoe mirae ripoteu-ui hanguk jonggyo hyeonhwang." (Report on the Future of the Korean Church: Religious situation in Korea). [gallup.chol.com/news/NEWS\\_content.asp?objSeqNo=1148&objPagePos=1&objSearch=&objSearchKeyword=](http://gallup.chol.com/news/NEWS_content.asp?objSeqNo=1148&objPagePos=1&objSearch=&objSearchKeyword=).
- Gerhards, Jürgen, and Dieter Rucht. 1992. "Mesomobilization: Organizing and Framing in Two Protest Campaigns in West Germany." *American Journal of Sociology* 98.
- Goffman, Erving. 1977. *Rahmen-Analyse: Ein Versuch über die Organisation von Alltagserfahrungen* (English translation required). Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Goldstone, Jack A. 1991. "An Analytical Framework." In *Revolutions of the Late Twentieth Century*, edited by Jack A. Goldstone et al. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Granovetter, Mark S. 1978. "Threshold Models of Collective Behavior." *American Journal of Sociology* 83.
- Kern, Thomas. 2003. "Kritische Ereignisse, Memory Frames und Protest in Südkorea (1980-1987)." *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 13.
- Kim, Seung-hwan. 2002. "Anti-Americanism in Korea." *Washington Quarterly* 26.
- Köllner, Patrick. 2002. "Die gesellschaftliche Verankerung politischer Parteien in Südkorea (Arbeitspapier)." (English translation required). [www.duei.de/de/content/forschung/pdf/ap9.pdf](http://www.duei.de/de/content/forschung/pdf/ap9.pdf).
- Lee, Jae-bong. 1994. "Cultural Representation of Anti-Americanism: The Negative Images of the United States in South Korean Literature and Arts, 1945-1994." PhD. Diss., University of Hawaii.
- Lee, Jay-gyeong. 1993. "Anti-Americanism in South Korea: The Media and the Politics of Signification". PhD diss., University of Iowa.
- Liem, Ramsay, and Kim Bong-gi. 1992. "Pico Korea Workers Struggle, Korean Americans and the Lessons of Solidarity." *Amerasia* 18.
- Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MOE), ed. 2004. *Education in Korea: 2003-2004*. Seoul: MOE.
- Mitchell, Derek J., ed. 2004. *Strategy and Sentiment: South Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.-ROK Alliance*. Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies.
- OECD. 2003. *Education at a Glance*. Paris: OECD.
- Ogle, George. 1990. *South Korea: Dissent with the Economic Miracle*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Oliver, Pamela E., and Hank Johnston. 2000. "What a Good Idea: Frames and Ideologies in Social Movement Research." *Mobilization: An International Journal* 5.
- Oliver, Pamela E., Gerald Marwell, and Ruy Teixeira. 1985. "A Theory of the Critical Mass I: Interdependence, Group Heterogeneity, and the Production of Collective Action." *The American Journal of Sociology* 90.
- Ortiz, Elisabeth. 1999. *The Changing Faces of Anti-Americanism in South Korea: A Historical Survey*. Seoul: Korea University Graduate School of international Studies.
- Schwartz, Barry. 1996. "Memory as a cultural system: Abraham Lincoln in World War II." *The American Sociological Review* 61.

- Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Scott-Stokes, Henry, and Lee Jai-ui, ed. 2000. *The Kwangju Uprising. Eyewitness Press Accounts of Korea's Tiananmen*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Shin, Gi-wuk. 1994. "The Historical Making of Collective Action. The Korean peasant Uprisings of 1946." *The American Journal of Sociology* 99.
- Snow, David A., and Robert D. Benford. 1992. "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest." In *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26.
- Snow, David A., Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford. 1986. "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51.
- Song, Ho-geun. 2003. "Politics, Generation, And the Making of a New Leadership in South Korea." In *Korea Re-examined: New Society, New Politics, New Economy?*, edited by Research Institute for Asia and the Pacific. Sydney: Research Institute for Asia and the Pacific.
- Taylor, Dorceta A. 2000. "The Rise of the Environmental Justice Paradigm." *American Behavioral Scientist* 43.

K C I