

The Contested Political Remembrance of the Kwangju Uprising and Presidential Speeches in South Korea

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Abstract

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This article analyzes commemorative speeches on the May 18 Kwangju Democracy Movement (1980) by South Korean presidents to investigate how the historical events have been interpreted across alternating political camps in power. Among various other issues regarding the interpretation and evaluation of the country's political history the May 18 Kwangju Democracy Movement is still not fully accounted for its causes and consequences, and remains contested by conservative forces 40 years after the events occurred. While there is a rich body of research on the May 18 Kwangju Democracy Movement including the topic of memory politics, presidential commemorative speeches so far have been neglected despite the fact that they represent an important mode of political communication in modern societies regarding the production of authoritative remembrance narratives. This article contributes to filling this void by examining all past May 18 Memorial Day addresses by presidents between 1993 and 2019, that is a total of 11 speeches. The study finds a clear tendency in conservative presidents' speeches toward rhetorical tactics that aim to depoliticize still-contested issues surrounding the May 18 Kwangju Democracy Movement with the effect of potentially forestalling critical engagement with its causes and consequences, and thus frustrating reconciliation.

Keywords: political polarization, memory politics, historical revisionism, state violence, 5.18 Kwangju Democracy Movement, 1980

1. Introduction

Together with the case of divided Germany, the division of the Korean peninsula was a key manifestation of the Cold War that began at the close of World War II in the mid-1940s and officially ended after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, German reunification, and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. However, the Korean peninsula remains divided, and the Cold War continues through other means. Besides the decades-old standoff between the two Koreas, the continuing polarization within South Korea (henceforth: Korea) between the progressives and the conservatives represents this phenomenon of a Cold War that still simmers.² Despite the downfall of the military dictatorship in 1987; government turnovers (Huntington 1993, 267) in 1998, 2008, and 2017; and the successful unseating of a corrupt president through the power of peaceful candlelight demonstrations in 2016–17, Cold War narratives such as anticommunism are still wielding a strong dividing influence in Korea. Even the May 18 Kwangju Democracy Movement³—one of the most crucial turning points in Korea’s history of democracy—is still not fully accounted for its causes and consequences, and remains contested by conservative forces 40 years after the event occurred.

Of course, the Kwangju Democracy Movement officially was recognized in 1988, the main perpetrators were convicted in 1995, and the Kwangju May 18 memorial day was held in 2000 under the auspices of the government, with the president (Kim Dae-jung) participating for the first time – and even giving the main commemoration address. Also, the Kwangju Democracy Movement has become well-known and praised internationally. Recently, Hong Kong demonstrators alluded to the tragic, but powerful event, when the Kwangju people empowered themselves and changed the course of history for their country. Nevertheless, within Korea, among conservatives, some still support the claim that the movement was a violent uprising that North Korean infiltrators generated in collaboration with dissident Kim Dae-jung to topple the government and allow for invasion by

² In lieu of more precise terms that cover the whole complexity of the dynamics and characteristics of the political landscape in Korea this paper follows Choi, Jang-jip (2009, 254) in using the expressions “progressives” and “conservatives” for designating the two major political camps in Korea.

³ The May 18 Kwangju Democracy Movement historically has been described in various ways (Choi, Young-tae 2015). In this article, several variations are used interchangeably such as May 18 Kwangju Uprising (*5.18 kwangju hangjaeng*), May 18 Kwangju Democracy (Democratization) Movement (*5.18 kwangju minjuhwa undong*), or Kwangju Massacre (*kwangju haksal*).

North Korean forces. In other words, the interpretation of the Kwangju Uprising is one of many issues that conservatives have challenged during their ongoing hegemonic-discourse battle with progressives over the nation's identity and history.

Mass media, including Internet news sources, have generated a continuous stream of reportage on reemerging controversies regarding the May 18 Kwangju democracy movement, often distorting historical facts (Citizens' Coalition for Democratic Media 2017). Scholarly works often engage in analyzing related revisionist phenomena scientifically, such as historical facts and narratives (Katsiaficas 2000; Choi Young-Tae 2008; An Chong-ch'öl 2016; Kim Chŏng-in et al. 2019), school curricula and history textbooks (Wang Hyŏn-jong 2016; Kim Chŏng-in 2017), judicial actions (May 18 Foundation 2006; Han In-sŏp 2006; Cho Mun-suk 2012), and political memory (Kim Hang 2011; Lewis 2002; Yea 2002; Mosler 2014). However, one form of political communication so far, by and large, has been neglected: presidential commemorative speeches on the Kwangju Uprising.⁴ This article contributes to filling this void by examining all past May 18 memorial day addresses by presidents that were held in person at Kwangju May 18 National Cemetery. The aim is to shed light on this understudied phenomenon and reveal what and how presidents have communicated to the people, as well as the differences between presidents across political camps. The existing literature mainly agrees on the fact that the Kwangju Uprising narrative, as a democracy movement, increasingly has been institutionalized, but at the same time establishes that conservative forces continuously attempt to challenge this narrative. Therefore, the questions that this article sets out to answer are: How did the presidents engage in remembrance discourse of the May 18 Kwangju Democracy Movement? How do these differing speeches relate to the overall polarizing discourse between the two political camps?

Since 1987, no president can afford to neglect the commemoration as such, as well as the May 18 Democracy Movement's meaning for the country's democracy. However, the way a president engages in political remembrance can vary, and by expressing things differently—i.e., emphasizing, de-emphasizing, or omitting certain aspects—a president can

⁴ One exception is a recent article by Cho, Wŏn-hyŏng (2017), who linguistically compares President Moon's 2017 speech in Kwangju with German President Gauck's 2016 address in the Ukraine in remembrance of the Babi Yar massacre committed by German forces in 1941.

influence discourse on a historical event and its meaning for the present and future, i.e., public memory. Undeniably, textbooks are crucial when it comes to instilling national identity based on a certain reading of watershed events from the nation's past. However, political communication by the president, i.e., presidential rhetoric, also “defines political reality” (Zarefsky 2004, 611) by way of topically associating, conceptually dissociating, symbolically condensing, and/or frame shifting (Zarefsky 2004, 611–613). In this way, commemorative addresses have an “educational function” (Wodak and Cillia 2007, 347) and, thus, are an important political communication mode in modern societies (Reisigl 2017, 369) that can “shape political cognition in society” (Bietti 2014, 64).

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. First, for background, I will provide a brief historical contextualization of the Kwangju Uprising and discuss its meaning for democracy in Korea. I then will introduce theoretical considerations on the usage of anticommunism and political polarization in Korea based on how the hegemonic-discourse battle regarding the interpretation of the Kwangju Uprising must be understood, which I introduce subsequently. In the third and main section, I begin with theoretical and methodological conceptualizations of the political communicational sub-genre of commemorative addresses, which will guide the ensuing analysis of 11 presidential speeches presented between 2000 and 2019. The conclusion summarizes the results of the comparison between progressive and conservative presidents' speeches, which, in the latter case, indicate a clear tendency toward rhetorical tactics that aim to depoliticize still-contested issues surrounding the complete and irrefutable accounts of the Kwangju Uprising.

2. The Kwangju Uprising and Its Meaning for Democratization and Democracy in Korea

The Kwangju Uprising

The period between Korea's liberation from Japanese occupation in 1945 and the two decades after the Korean War armistice in 1953 has been definitive and formative concerning the main political division that developed within Korea. In the aftermath of WWII and as part of the ensuing Cold War, the international system took on a bipolar character that affected frontline states, including Korea. During the three years leading up to the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948, the U.S. military government in Korea pursued a staunch anticommunist policy that persecuted movements or forces in the middle of the political spectrum or to the left of it. Moderate, liberal, or leftist leaders, politicians, or like-minded people mostly fled to the north or even to other countries, leading to a political landscape in the south that had been dominated almost completely by conservative forces. The ideology of anticommunism became state doctrine and effectively was amplified through the firsthand experience of the Korean War (1950–53). The ensuing decades of succeeding authoritarian regimes promoted a dominant political culture based on anticommunism and state-led development, best represented by the development dictatorship under President Park Chung-hee (1961–1979). Shortly after Park was assassinated in 1979 by his own chief of the Secret Service, General Chun Doo-hwan staged a military coup, seizing power over the state apparatus. The hope raised among the Korean people for democracy was crushed, leading to demonstrations demanding the lifting of martial law and the end of dictatorship nationwide, including in the City of Kwangju. Soldiers were sent to Kwangju to suppress the student demonstrations violently, triggering an uprising by Kwangju residents for 10 days. Government paratroopers' final brutal suppression ended in the massacre of many Kwangju residents—a massacre that, through fake

news, was portrayed by authorities as a “riot” that North Korean infiltrators and dissident Kim Dae-jung instigated.

After the Uprising

In the mid-1980s, as a result of increasing pressure from the democratic movement and the citizenry, the authoritarian government made crucial concessions that would lead to formal democratization in 1987. Shortly after this transition, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the beginning of the end of the Cold War in the form of an increasingly liberal and open Korea posed yet another challenge to the nation’s conservative forces. After the democratic “rules of the game” began to consolidate, the famous dissident Kim Dae-jung was elected the first president from the progressive camp in 1997—10 years after the shift to a formal democracy. This was a milestone in that it was the first democratic and peaceful turnover from a conservative to a progressive government. In particular, President Kim’s engagement policy toward North Korea, the Sunshine Policy, was a radical shift even when compared with his democratically elected predecessors. By the same token, this created an equally large threat to conservative forces, whose very existence and power had been legitimized almost exclusively through the doctrine of anticommunism, which was based on the othering and securitizing (Smith 2000) of North Korea. With the emerging liberal press around the turn of the 21st century, this can be understood as the initiation of political polarization and political parallelism, i.e., certain media outlets gave voice to certain social, economic, and political interests and to respective political parties, forces, or camps (cf. Hallin and Mancini 2004, 21), or that media reflected or even generated political divisions or polarization (cf. Hardy 2008). It is important to note that in Korea, there has been a remarkable preponderance of outlets progressive vs. conservative media outlets dating back to the legacies under the authoritarian regimes,⁵ accompanied by “an incessant struggle for predominance of the conservatives over the democratic-progressives” (Wooyeol Shin 2016, 134) in an attempt “to maintain its privileged sociopolitical position in Korean

⁵ No less than almost two-thirds of Korea’s newspaper market is dominated by conservative outlets in terms of circulation and revenue (Chông Ch’ol-un 2015).

society” (121).

Although somewhat simplified, it can be said that the two main opposing forces in Korea today are manifestations of these historical trajectories. The current conservative camp can be traced to the regime parties during the authoritarian era of developmental dictatorship, while the current progressive camp can be traced to opposition parties and the democratization movement during the dictatorship era.

The Kwangju Uprising's Meaning for Democracy

Several reasons can explain why the Kwangju Uprising exerted important effects on the democratization movement, democratization in Korea, and—to some extent—on other countries. First, the Kwangju Uprising's origins lie in the Kwangju people's protest against the continuation of dictatorship after strongman Park Chung-hee was assassinated, and Chun Doo-hwan seized power shortly afterward at the end of 1979. In other words, the root of the movement that had spread from Seoul to throughout the whole country, including Kwangju, was the rejection of dictatorship and suppression by the authoritarian state (Kim Ho-gi 2010), leading to demands for political and civil rights, freedoms, human rights, and democracy. This marked the first time in Korea's history that a collective political subject (*minjung*) in the sense of a *demos* claiming *kratos* emerged that supported and wanted to realize democracy (Choi Jang-jip 2007, 150). Up to that point, the preceding emancipatory, independence and/or democracy movements in Korea mostly were led by intellectual elites, while the people followed with less of a determined awareness of democratic ideals and values.

Second, the Kwangju people standing their ground against the military's suppression, which escalated into extreme brutality with the massacre of Kwangju residents, ultimately revealed the nature of military rule through the state's unjustifiable assault of its own citizens. Put differently, in the process of the uprising, the inequities of a military dictatorship, i.e., the threat of democracy through the military's intervention into politics, was proven through

physical evidence, thereby providing the grounds for rejecting this even more strongly (Kim Yong Cheol 2001, 249). Though the problems with the military dictatorships' ruling styles and methods through the decades naturally did not go unnoticed among the populace, the narrative that justified the need for a strongly regulatory force against otherwise corrupt politicians to ensure economic growth was internalized by large parts of society. In this way, it could be argued the military dictatorship was the lesser evil, helping to justify strongman rule. The powerful effect that exposing the military dictatorship through the massacre had was that strongman Chun Doo-hwan was compelled to make conciliatory gestures to the democracy movement and opposition camp (Kim Yong Cheol 2001, 249), which, in turn, provided decisive room for maneuvering against the junta, such as the creation of political parties, participation in elections, and pressing for regime reform. Furthermore, the massacre reinvigorated the overall democracy movement (Choi Jang-jip 2007, 146; Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang 2003).

Besides the effect of revealing its true colors, the military's brutality backfired in several other regards. The Kwangju massacre afterward became a violence threshold that was difficult, if not impossible, to surpass ever again. In other words, it created a thick red line never again to cross, and even the Chun regime in 1987 did not dare to go beyond it—also because the U.S. had shifted its position from an absolute preference for stability regardless of the means to one that focused on the soft power of liberal democracy. In addition, the Kwangju people's physical experience of the war-like atrocities committed by the military became a trauma for survivors, but at the same time became the basis for self-assurance, pride, and righteousness as powerful means for the struggle for truth, recognition, and restitution. Relatedly, the many deaths were a tragedy, but at the same time became a powerful source for necro-politics—the fact that death cannot be discussed away and, thus, serves as strong evidence of victimhood.

Third, the Kwangju people strongly opposed and fought state authorities' attempt to isolate the city physically and ideologically. Physical isolation aimed to prevent the

spread of rhetorical seeds of protest to other cities and block possible support for the uprising outside of Kwangju. Ideological isolation served as a war tactic to stigmatize and, thus, delegitimize the cause of the uprising. By way of localization tactics (*kukchihwa*), the authorities framed the protest as being a matter limited to the City of Kwangju only, instigated by North Korean infiltrators with the help of influential opposition politician Kim Dae-jung, who hails from the Chölla province. The intention was to discredit any claim by Kwangju's people or those supporting them by stigmatizing the uprising as a communist rebellion against the state, thereby instilling fear and rejection in the rest of the populace. This strategy of denigrating the declared enemy (of the state) and distorting facts belongs to the military warfare playbook in general, as well as to the repertoire of politics by public security, e.g., fear-mongering based on Cold War anticommunism, exercised by Korean military dictatorships in particular. However, this demonizing strategy was frustrated significantly by Kwangju residents' protest behavior, who attempted to settle the conflict peacefully and democratically, first with local authorities and later with military forces. The core of the collective self-understanding of Kwangju protestors comprised democratic-republican values and patriotism, i.e., a strong commitment to the political community (Shin Jin-Wook 2011).

Moreover, the movement was neither led by a leader nor organized by an organization, as these already had been taken out by the authorities – nor was it motivated by some kind of political ideology other than the ideas of republicanism as stipulated in the Constitution (Shin Jin-Wook 2011). Although it had begun as student protests in the beginning that spilled over from Seoul into other parts of the country, once suppression had become stronger, and soldiers applied brute force against anyone on the streets, people from all walks of life were involved in the struggle. More importantly, even during the military's violent siege, Kwangju's society remained peaceful, respectful, and law-abiding, which was a forceful demonstration of lived democracy, thereby underlining the righteousness of the protest's cause. This moral superiority has been an important ingredient in the

struggle for truth and recognition of events. In the immediate aftermath of the uprising, victims' associations, in cooperation with parts of the wider movement for democracy, were the main actors fighting for public recognition. They sought official recognition of the movement's legitimacy, as well as restitution for the injustices that the state inflicted upon them (Jung 2005). Even merely commemorating the dead was illegal, and for years after the uprising, the authoritarian government strictly prohibited publicly discussing the events in Kwangju (Kim Hang 2011). Only after the fall of the military dictatorship at the end of 1987 did victims and survivors begin to be recognized, as well as perpetrators' names and official accounts of the massacre. Another result of the authoritarian government framing Kwangju a red city was a strong regionalist sentiment in the province of Ch'ŏlla. While various theories surfaced on the origins of regionalism in Korea, as well as several possible factors, the Kwangju Uprising and the discrimination against the Ch'ŏlla province in this regard are some of the most crucial factors. During the presidential elections in 1971, the two main camps tried to mobilize the electorate along geographical lines, and particularly during the presidential elections in 1987, the two democratic candidates' camps used the regional cue for differentiation. However, the actual source, which effectively provided the fuel for the power of regionalism, was Kwangju's stigmatization by the dictatorship. While regionalism mainly has exerted a negative impact on democratic development, one aspect in this case actually has been beneficial for steady democratization. The disproportionately strong regionalism in the Ch'ŏlla province guaranteed not only constant pressure in elections on the authoritarian and later the conservative camp—beginning with the landslide victory of oppositional parties in 1985 – but also made possible the historical government change at the end of the 1990s to a democratic leadership (Choi Jang-jip 2007, 156–157).

The fact that the U.S., which was thought of as a defender of liberal democracy and a friend of the Korean people, decided not to intervene when the Korean soldiers massacred their own people shocked the general populace, particularly Kwangju citizens who, in the aftermath of the massacre,

developed an anti-US sentiment (Kim Yong Cheol 2003, 233). In turn, this disappointment and feeling of betrayal translated into a stronger focus on the ethnic nation, or nationalism. In combination with the experience of the blunt force exerted by government authorities, this led to a general radicalization of students and the democracy movement (Kim Yong Cheol 2003, 233). Last, but not least, the courageous uprising became a shining example throughout Asia of resisting a dictatorship (Katsiaficas 2000, 100–103)—resistance that continues to this day elsewhere, as demonstrators in Hong Kong relate to the Korean people by comparing their circumstances to the events in Kwangju in 1980 (South China Morning Post 2019).

3. The Continuing Struggle for Truth, Recognition, and Restitution

Keeping it Hot: Cold War Anticommunism as a Political Weapon

The interpretation of the Kwangju Uprising is one of many issues that the conservatives have challenged in the hegemonic-discourse battle with progressives. A plethora of research has analyzed how and why in Korea, anticommunism still plays an important role in constraining critical thinking and political discourse in general (Kwang-Yeong Shin 2017). A central symptom of this Cold War in Korea that has remained hot is increasing political polarization. Research has argued that the main cause of this division can be traced to an increasing challenge to the traditional authoritarian anticommunist identity, triggering a particularly “strong reaction[s] from conservatives” (Shin and Burke 2008, 288–290). For recent conservative governments under Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye (2008–2017) it was found that the anticommunism narrative that authoritarian regimes had used in the past to justify their existence and actions were modified to fit the present democratic system (Sunwoo Hyun 2014). The conservatives’ discursive strategies include disseminating pejorative terms for stigmatizing progressive forces, such as “*ppalgaengi (commies)*,” “*chongbukchwap’a*

(*leftist North Korea loyalists*),” and “*pulsunbunja (impure elements)*” (Sunwoo, Hyun 2018, 279–280). For example, by promoting a *chongbuk*-narrative, conservative forces attempt to legitimize their own positions while delegitimizing any other opinions regarding North Korean issues by denouncing political opponents as “North Korea loyalists” (Kim Jeong-in 2014). Other derogative terms that are used in the media for the same purpose include “*ch’inbuk (pro-North Korean)*,” “*chwap’a (leftist)*,” and “*chusap’a (pro-juche faction)*” (Chu Chae-won 2017, 211–212). The usage of the “*namnam kaldŭng (South-South conflict)*” trope is yet another recurring argumentative pattern across conservative media reportage (Mosler and Chang 2019). At face value, the metaphoric depiction of political polarization between conservatives and progressive forces seems to be a convincing analogy that aptly and neutrally captures the characteristics of the conflict constellation at hand: two camps from the same entity (South Korea) fighting over how to deal with another entity (North Korea). However, this seemingly objective assessment or ostensibly justified criticism covertly appropriates meaning the term South-South conflict, and thereby effectively mobilizes bias. Together these various narratives are part of a discursive strategy for maintaining dominance over the growing acceptance and adoption of liberal and progressive ideas and respective changes in Korea’s society that have been emerging since the end of the 1990s, representing a challenge to conservatives’ hegemonic discourse and, thus, to their existential legitimacy.

In addition to the ideational legacies of anticommunist indoctrination in people’s (sub-)conscious, artifacts such as particular legal norms serve as authoritative normative institutions that justify and, thus, crucially corroborate the conservative strategy of translating the Cold War mentality, that is anticommunism, into contemporary *Zeitgeist*. Legal standards—such as the Constitution (Articles 3, 4, and 8), National Security Act (NSA), and Anticommunism Act (ACA)—have been the most effective grounds on which the suppression of critical forces were practiced and on which antithetical narratives related to anchoring their argumentative logic were presented in a justifiable and

⁶ Currently, the NSA still includes statutes that have been criticized even by international bodies—including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the UNHRC—as being so vaguely worded that they are prone to be misused as weapons against political dissent, which can be framed as allegedly helping the enemy.

justiciable basis (Mosler 2019, 213–218).⁶ Moreover, powerful actors particularly, though not only, under conservative administrations translate this narrative into reality. In other words, the discursive performance does not limit itself to media reportage, but extends to substantial activities of a conservative advocacy coalition (i.e., politicians, media, industry, activists) that actualize bias in the form of material discrimination against and/or exclusion of certain individuals or organizations. On top of cooperating with or seizing control of media outlets under conservative governments (2008–2017), state organs systematically have been intimidating and disadvantaging artists, writers, actors, journalists, civil society organizations, and individuals who are critical of the government, while conservative non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been supported. School history textbooks were re-written to fit interpretations of conservative ideology; the leftist United Progressive Party was banned; court judges were either blacklisted or pressed into manipulating decisions in line with conservative ideology; the police, secret service, and other state organs were misused to manipulate public opinion and elections; and a hostile policy toward North Korea was pursued.⁷

⁷ For a general overview of some of these activities under the conservative administrations, see Doucette and Koo (2016).

At the heart of the issue is the way this conflict has been manipulated into polarization. By reproducing antithetical thinking, political conflict is framed as political polarization and, thus, constructive agonism (Mouffe 2000) is transformed into destructive antagonism that helps maintain the division of minds in Korea and the division of the Korean peninsula at large (Mosler and Chang 2019). It is in this context in which the Kwangju narrative has continuously been challenged even after the demise of the dictatorship at the end of the 1980s.

Institutionalization of the Kwangju Democracy Movement Narrative

In March 1988, the Fifth Curriculum for high school history textbooks was made public, which for the first time included the May 18 Kwangju Democracy Movement, though only later, in the Sixth (1992) and Seventh (1997) Curricula, were more concrete and detailed explanations and evaluations added to

the curriculum (Wang Hyŏn-jong 2016; Im Sŏn-hwa 2018, 55–56). In June 1988, the National Assembly established a “Special Committee on Truth Finding of the Kwangju Democracy Movement,” which also held public hearings on unresolved related issues. In November 1988, President Roh Tae-woo, in an official speech, used the title “May 18 Democratic Uprising” for the first time, ending the practice of calling the Kwangju Uprising the “Kwangju riots” (see Choi, Young-Tae 2015). In 1990, after a respective law had been enacted, victims of the May 18th Democratic Uprising began to receive compensation for their losses. In 1991, the song “March for the Beloved” (“*im-ül wihan haengjin’gok*”) was published for the first time officially on the new album of the group Nochatsa, who popularized the genre of political folk music (*minjung gayo*) that was first sung by activists during the dictatorship of the 1980s and, thus, is associated with that era’s protests. The song had been banned by authorities, and still in the 1990s, some TV channels and radio stations would censor themselves and cut the song from recorded events (Kim 1996). The song is the most representative song of the Kwangju Uprising and has become well-known and a symbol for democracy and rights movements overseas, particularly in Southeast Asia (Yŏ Hyŏn-ho 1989).⁸ The Special Act on the May 18 Democratization Movement, introduced in 1995, allowed, among other things, for retroactive punishment of crimes related to the Kwangju uprising. In the aftermath, the main perpetrators of the suppression—namely former state leaders Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo—were convicted and sentenced to death and life sentences, respectively. In December 1995, the Constitutional Court ruled that the acts of insurrection by the two former presidents were neither justified by the circumstances, nor ratified by the citizenry and, therefore, were unlawful (Constitutional Court 1995). The following year, the Constitutional Court upheld Article 2 of the Special Act on the May 18 Democratization Movement, which suspended the use of public prosecutions for leaders of the violent suppression of the Kwangju people to punish them as criminals for disrupting the constitutional order (Constitutional Court 1996). In 1997, May 18 was made an official memorial day, and in the same year, the anniversary was celebrated under the auspices of the government with Prime Minister

⁸ Even recently, Korean protest music is inspiring Hong Kong’s demonstrators (T. K. Park 2019).

Ko Kōn giving the main commemorative speech at the newly constructed May 18th National Cemetery in Kwangju. In 2000, Kim Dae-jung, as the first president, made a memorial speech in Kwangju. In 2002, the Act on the Honorable Treatment of Persons of Distinguished Services to the May 18 Democratization Movement was passed in parliament.

Table 1. Milestones in Institutionalizing the Kwangju Movement

Date	Item
03/31/1988	• Publication of the Fifth Curriculum for High School history textbooks, including for the first time the nomination of the May 18 Kwangju Democracy Movement
06/27/1988–12/19/1989	• (National Assembly's) Special Committee on Truth Finding of the Kwangju Democracy Movement (<i>Kwangju minjuhwa'undong chinsangjosa t'ukpyōlwiwōnhoe</i>)
11/18/1988–02/24/1989	• National Assembly's hearings on the Kwangju Democracy Movement
11/26/1988	• President Roh Tae-woo officially uses the expression "Kwangju Democracy Movement (<i>Kwangju minjuhwa'undong</i>)"
08/06/1990	• Act on Compensation to Persons Associated with the May 18 Democratization Movement and Similar Matters (<i>Kwangju minjuhwa'undong kwallyōnja posang-e kwanhan pōmyul</i>), No. 4266
12/15/1995	• Constitutional Court rules that the acts of insurrection by Choun Doo-whan and Roh Tae-woo were unlawful
12/21/1995	• Special Act on the May 18 Democratization Movement, etc. (<i>5.18 minjuhwa'undong tūng-e kwanhan t'ukpyōlbōp</i>), No 5029
02/16/1996	• The Constitutional Court rules the Special Act constitutional (96-hōnba-13)
08/26/1996	• Seoul District Court issues a death sentence for Chun Doo-hwan and life imprisonment for Roh Tae-woo
05/09/1997	• Regulations on various memorial days etc. (<i>kakchong kinyōmil tūng-e kwanhan kyujōng</i>); No. 15369 (presidential decree) designates May 18 as the official memorial day
05/13/1997	• Completion of the May 18th National Cemetery
05/18/1997	• For the first time, the democracy movement officially is commemorated by the government; Prime Minister Ko Kōn makes a commemorative speech at the 5.18 cemetery in Kwangju
05/18/2000	• As the nation's first president, Kim Dae-jung makes a commemorative speech in person in Kwangju.
07/27/2002	• Act on the Honorable Treatment of Persons of Distinguished Services to the May 18 Democratization Movement (<i>Kwangju minjuyugangja ye'u-e kwanhan pōmyul</i>), No. 6650 • The May 18 Kwangju Cemetery is elevated in status to a national cemetery (<i>kungnip 5.18 minjumyoji</i>)
05/25/2011	• UNESCO Memory of the World inscription of the Human Rights Documentary Heritage 1980 Archives for the May 18th Democratic Uprising
05/12/2017	• Official designation of "March for the Beloved" as the commemorative song for the Kwangju memorial day (ordered by President Moon)
09/2017–02/07/2018	• 5.18 Special Investigation Committee of the Ministry of Defense (<i>kukpangbu 5.18 t'ukpyōljosawiwōnhoe</i>)
09/14/2018	• Special Act on the May 18 Democratization Movement's Truth Finding, (<i>5.18 minjuhwa'undong chinsanggyumyōng-ūl wihan t'ukpyōlbōp</i>)

Revisionists' Resurgence

Even though the democracy movement in general and the Kwangju movement and its activists in particular empowered themselves step by step against the pressure from authoritarian forces, complete and irreversible recognition was difficult even until long after democratization. However,

a crucial backlash in this regard occurred under the two conservative governments of Presidents Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye between 2008 and 2017, although the emergence of the New Right Movement around the election of progressive President Roh Moo-hyun in 2004 was an important precursor. Among the New Right's various goals are to "limit substantive political reforms and roll back the progressive initiatives of previous liberal administrations," as well as "restrict the ability of state institutions to address past wrongs, and to influence the high school curriculum, public broadcasting, and academic research" (Doucette and Koo 2016, 213–215). Beginning with the Eighth Curriculum and the respective guidelines for compiling elementary, middle, and high school textbooks in 2007, provided by the Ministry of Education, the description of events leading to, causing, and following from the Kwangju Uprising was reduced dramatically and simplified so that a proper understanding of the historic relationships and meanings became difficult or even distorted (Kim Chŏng-in 2017; Im Sŏn-hwa 2018). Under the Park Geun-hye administration, the authorities attempted to introduce a government monopoly for publishing textbooks, and the New Right wielded influence on prospective content, which was found to include reduced descriptions to a revisionist extent (see Wang Hyŏn-jong 2016, 32). Moreover, conservative activists such as Chi Man-wŏn (2006, 2009, 2010, 2014) and Kim Tae-ryŏng (2013) have been publishing books in which they try to refute even the official narrative and replace it with one that is in line with the conservative rumors that have been around since May 1980. Chi Man-wŏn claimed that around 600 North Korean troops infiltrated into Kwangju to stage a "riot", and that Kim Dae-jung played a crucial part in instigating the "incident" in the first place (Chi Man-wŏn 2006; Kang Chu-hŭi 2015). Likewise, Kim Tae-ryŏng argues that North Korean-loyalist in South Korea and North Korean Special Forces intervened in the movement (2013). However, a detailed look at the two revisionists' publications (An Chong-ch'ŏl 2015; Kim Tae-ryŏng 2013; Kim Hŭi-song 2014a) reveals that not the sources of the documents based on which the author built his argument were mostly of obscure nature, and that the purported narrative was merely a reproduction of the

narrative propagated by the military junta back then. Thus, not surprisingly former strongman Chun Doo-hwan in 2017 published his autobiography makes a series of resembling claims of historical distortions regarding events in Kwangju. Among others, Chun argues that North Korean troops infiltrated the “riot (*p’oktong*),” that a massacre of unarmed civilians did not occur, that he did not in any way participate in the incident, and that there had been no shooting by a military helicopter (Cho Yu-bin 2017a). The falsehood of these claims were not only disputed by progressive scholars, large parts of the public (Kang, Chu-hŭi 2015), and the courts (Kim Ŭn-gyŏng 2020), but even journalist Cho Gab-je (2007, 2013, 2019), who is known to be a hardline conservative, strongly refuted most of the core allegations including the rumor on North Korean infiltration troops (2013).

In 2011, the Human Rights Documentary Heritage 1980 Archives for the May 18th Democratic Uprising was inscribed into the UNESCO Memory of the World Register (e.g., Mosler 2014). One way of addressing the continuous threat of revisionist backlashes was to adopt an internationalization strategy of memorialization (Lewis 2006, 149). Civil society organizations increasingly became engaged in remembrance practices and started to frame the uprising as a worldwide model for the development of democracy. The inscription of the Kwangju Uprising Archive into the UNESCO Memory of the World Register in 2011 represents something of a culmination of the internationalization of remembrance practices for the Kwangju Uprising (Mosler 2014, 78). Twice during the application process for registering the Kwangju Archive with the UNESCO Memory of the World Register, conservative civic organizations tried to sabotage the endeavor (Mosler 2014, 82–83). At the end of 2010, these groups intervened directly at UNESCO’s Paris headquarters, prompting a halt to the review process. Later, one of the organizations sent another note to UNESCO, claiming that North Korean infiltrators instigated the Kwangju Uprising and implied that former president Kim Dae-jung had been involved (Hankyoreh 2011; Choe Wŏn-hyŏng 2011; Ko Tong-myŏng 2013; Yi Hyŏng-chu 2013). Moreover, the note suggested that the special acts passed in connection with the Kwangju Uprising actually might

have been unconstitutional and that the civilians who were involved in the struggle illegitimately and illegally resorted to violence (Mosler 2014, 82–85).

Another noteworthy development during the Lee and Park presidencies is the apparent growing reluctance to give the memorial day of the Kwangju Uprising too much attention. President Lee attended the memorial day in person only in his first year and made the main commemorative speech, a tradition that had existed since 2000, when President Kim Dae-jung attended the event, the first time a president had done so. Thus, the president traditionally made the main commemorative speech, or else the prime minister read the president's address, but in 2010, the prime minister made the speech in his name, which was criticized as downgrading the memorial day. In addition, President Lee participated in the commemoration events of the April Revolution that year, but did not come to Kwangju. He also has been criticized for behaving inappropriately during former visits to the cemetery and for having called the Kwangju Uprising an "incident" ("*Kwangju sat'ae*") when he ran for office in 2007 (Yi Chubin 2010). In addition, the Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs (*kukkabohunch'ō*) excluded the singing of "March for the Beloved" in 2010 (in 2009, it was not excluded, but was not sung either), which led to some of the 5.18 groups boycotting the memorial day ceremony. It was re-introduced in 2011, but was not sung by participants, but sung by a choir.⁹ In 2012, the president had not attended the memorial day ceremony for four years in a row, and again the president's speech was substituted by the prime minister's speech. A year later, under newly elected President Park, the Ministry of Veterans' Affairs again attempted to exclude the "March for the Beloved" on the memorial day, though it was sung by a choir at the end after strong opposition from progressive groups and politicians. Nonetheless, some of the 5.18 groups again did not participate to protest against the authorities' treatment of the memorial day (Pak Chung-bae et al. 2013). Also, private conservative TV stations, such as TV Chosun and Channel A, broadcasted reports repeating the claim that the Kwangju Uprising was instigated and supported by North Korea (Yu Tae-gŭn and Kim Min-sŏk 2013). In 2014, 5.18 groups and progressive

⁹ This is a politically important difference, because when the choir (*hapch'angdan*) sings the song, participants can sing along (*hapch'ang*), but do not have to do so. If, however, the participants are supposed to sing the song (*chech'ang*), then not singing along can become a sign of rejecting the symbolic act of commemorating the dead.

politicians boycotted the event completely because the song is still not recognized as the official commemorative song for the memorial day (Pak 2014). In 2015 and 2016, the song officially still was not recognized and was sung only by a choir at the end of the ceremony (Paek Ch'öl 2015). Amid protests from 5.18 groups, politicians from both camps participated in and sang along (Hwang Hŭi-gyu 2015). Conservative groups claimed that part of the lyrics symbolized Kim Il-sung and socialist revolution, which would make it unacceptable for government-sponsored commemoration events (see JH Ahn 2016).

Finally, since 2017, under the administration of President Moon, “March for the Beloved” officially again has been recognized as the commemorative song of the Kwangju memorial day, which is expected to be sung by all participants of the ceremony. Also, President Moon participated in the commemorative event and gave the main address. In addition, in his attempt to reform the Constitution, he intended to add the Kwangju Uprising to the preamble to enshrine the movement’s importance to the country’s democracy. This was not only one of his presidential election pledges, but also seems to have been in line with the public’s views (Pak Sŏng-hun 2017), as well as experts’ views (Chung Young Chul 2018), on the matter.¹⁰ However, because constitutional reform as such failed, the Kwangju Uprising has not been added to the preamble as of the writing of this paper. At least enactment of the Special Act on the May 18 Democratization Movement’s Truth Finding was passed successfully in 2018 and provides the basis for further truth-finding activities in the context of the May 18 Democratization Movement’s Truth Finding Commission, formed at the end of 2019. While recently, Chi Man-wŏn was sentenced to two years in prison and a fine of ₩1 million (ca. US \$840) for defamation by a court because of his claim that the May 18 Democratization Movement was carried out by North Korean special forces (Kim Ũn-gyŏng 2020), time and again conservative politicians and activists make continuously make derogative, discrediting, and distorting remarks on the Kwangju Democratization Movement (Yi Ch’i-dong 2019; Rahn Kim 2020).

¹⁰ In 1987, the Democratic Unification Party tried to add the Kwangju movement to the revised Constitution, but, the ruling party prevented that from happening (Min Pyŏng-ro 2018, 21).

4. Commemorative Speeches on the Kwangju Uprising by Presidents

Commemorative Speeches and Authoritative Political Remembrance

Coming from the Latin *commemorare*, commemoration means “remembering together” and, thus, describes a social activity that involves collective actors. Having usually been a religious practice, commemoration has become a political practice for the purposes of communicating with the collective political subject of the people (Reisigl 2017, 369). Political communication is a “highly goal-oriented performance” (Bietta 2014, 64) of politicians who “attempt to get others to share a common view about what is useful, harmful, good-evil, just-unjust” (Chilton 2004, 199, cited in Bietta 2014) through political speeches. In line with this thinking, political speech in the form of commemorative addresses has an “educational function” in the sense that it “seeks to convey certain political values and beliefs to construct common characteristics and identities, and to create consensus and a spirit of community which, in turn, is intended to serve as a model for future political actions of the addressees” (Wodak and Cillia 2007, 347). The commemorative speech is an important mode of political communication in modern societies (Reisigl 2017, 369) because it can “shape political cognition in society,” e.g., through “new modes of framing the past of political state violence, but also (through) new ways of self-positioning in the present and the future” (Bietta 2014, 64). Normally, commemorative addresses are “organized around the cyclical return of an occasion that relates to a meaningful moment in the past of a political community and its ‘lessons’ for the present and future” (Reisigl 2017, 368), and it is produced and presented by high-level politicians, addressing the audience at the commemoration event or the general public(s), as these speeches often are reported by news media (Girnth 2010; Reisigl 2008, 259). The commemorative speech can be sub-divided into epideictic (demonstrating, indicating), deliberative, and judicial purposes. Epideictic purposes encompass retrospective praising (laudatory),

criticizing (vituperative), or warning against (admonitory) events, actions, or actors related to the events, as well as comforting (consolatory), appreciating (thanking), and glorifying (congratulatory) facts, or wishing (optative), promising, or teaching functions. The deliberative purpose includes appeasing (conciliatory), cautioning (admonitory), promising, and teaching functions. The judicial purpose includes accusing, acquitting (exculpatory), and vindicating (justificatory) functions. Commemorative speeches typically comprise a mix of all or some of these functions (Reisigl 2008, 254–255). Typically, commemorative speeches include speech acts, such as remembering, apologizing, expressing sorrow, and appealing (Girnth 2010).

These communicative functions are put into practice through a structural and semiotic strategy in the speech. The common structure of commemorative speeches comprises the introduction, main part, and the end. The introduction is divided into a salute with an appellative function to connect with the audience, followed by a part that attracts listeners as a way of capturing the audience's interest, and the proposition, which familiarizes addressees with the topic of commemoration at hand (past) as a final preparatory step in the introduction. In the main part of the speech, the topic's general narrative is laid out first, which is explanatory, but also may be argumentative, followed by the actual *argumentation*, which aims to persuade the audience concerning a certain perspective on or perception of the historical event or person at hand by elaborating on causes and consequences in the form of juxtaposing positions (*probatio* and *refutatio*) (Reisigl 2017, 371). This is also the main stage for employing certain argumentative patterns (*topoi*), i.e., introducing, stressing, or omitting facts, topics, or perspectives, often strategically, using rhetorical figures of speech (tropological patterns), such as metaphors, metonymies, and synecdoches (Reisigl 2017, 377–378). A central component of the narrative and argumentation is the discursive representation of crucial events, central actors, and closely related actions that are nominated, predicated, or omitted, which can be accomplished by way of “defining a situation” by topically associating, conceptually dissociating,

symbolically condensing, and/or frame shifting (Zarefsky 2004, 611–613). Depending on the method of portraying events, actors, and actions through either positive or negative attributions, the representation has respective effects in framing the past (Reisigl 2017, 377). Commemorative addresses often contain terms that express sorrow, shame, and grief, as well as ventilating principles and values such as peace, freedom, and justice, and the personal pronoun “we” to establish a connection between the speech’s speaker and the addressees (Girnth 2010, 14). Symbolic gestures often are part of a commemorative speech to support the speech’s content with performative emphasis (Reisigl 2017, 376).

Another important possible feature of defining strategies in commemorative speeches is “grounding discourse” (Jamieson 1988), which is blurring, mollifying, or even “eras (ing) unpleasant details of death in war in favor of more abstract, positive associations” (Slavickova 2013, 363) through synoptic speech acts (Jamieson 1988, 91). By rhetorically smoothing out potential controversial aspects of the commemorated event(s), the speaker can focus the narrative instead on what shall be done without possibly providing prompt opposition or even protesting due to the selection of controversial matters or simply “unpleasant details.” One of the possible effects from this typical speech act in memorial addresses is depoliticizing the matter at hand, i.e., presenting a historical incident in the past and its meaning for the present and future in a way that prevents the audience from thinking normatively about alternative perspectives on the matter and potentially disagreeing with the presented interpretation. Put another way, through the tactic of “preference-shaping depoliticization,” the presented interpretation and ensuing requests for future acting are portrayed as being without alternatives and neutral, with the discourse becoming dissent-aversive (Flinders and Buller 2006, 307– 311), i.e., the audience is discouraged from seeing the matter ideologically and is encouraged to approach it pragmatically (see Himmelstrand 1962).¹¹

¹¹ For a general discussion of depoliticization in the Korean context, see Doucette and Koo (2016).

Descriptive Overview

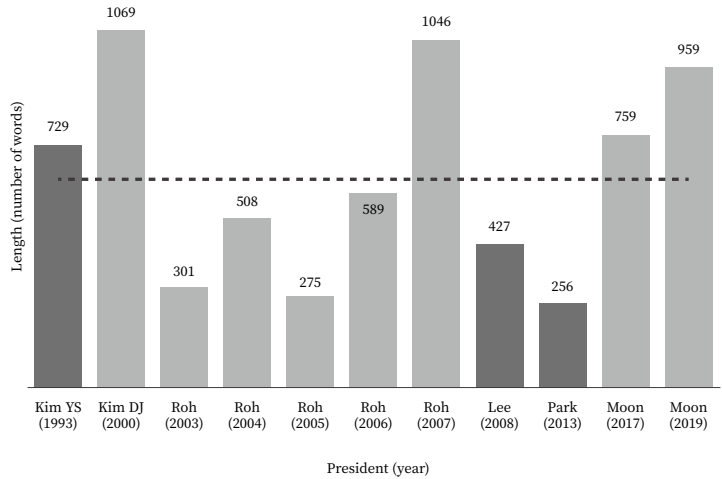
The corpus of commemorative speeches on the Kwangju Uprising by Korean presidents includes ten texts in total. The speeches were limited to those actually made by a president in person in Kwangju at the May 18 anniversary ceremony and excludes, for example, messages by presidents given in a speech by somebody else or conveyed via video or in writing. Of the eleven speeches used in this study, President Kim Young-sam held the first speech in 1993,¹² followed by a single address by President Kim Dae-jung in 2000, and five speeches by President Roh Moo-hyun from 2003 to 2007. Conservative Presidents Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye each made only one speech in their inauguration years, 2008 and 2013, respectively. Since then, President Moon Jae-in made speeches in his first (2017) and third years (2019) in office.

The first remarkable difference across time and between the presidents is that some presidents chose to make one speech only, while others made several (see Figure 1 below). In particular, it is noteworthy that both conservative presidents each gave only one commemorative address in Kwangju during their whole 5-year term. President Kim Dae-jung, too, gave only one speech, but he also was the first president to hold such a speech in person at the site of the May 18 National Cemetery, and it was in his third year of incumbency, so there was less time for additional addresses later. Meanwhile, President Roh made a speech in Kwangju every year he was in office, and President Moon so far made two during his first three years in office. Concerning the speeches' length, President Kim delivered the longest in 2000, while President Park in 2013 made the shortest. Overall, progressive presidents tended to make longer speeches than those of conservative presidents. All the progressive presidents made at least one speech longer than the average length (628.9 words), while both speeches by the conservative presidents Lee and Park are clearly below average, and only Kim Young-sam's address tops the average. Regarding length of the texts, which could be an indicator for the degree of involvement in the matter, there seems to be no clear pattern over time in general, allowing for the assumption that the

¹² President Kim Young-sam's special statement (*t'ŭkpyŏl tamhwa*) on the Kwangju Uprising is an exception in that it was not a pure commemorative speech in the strict sense and in light of its designation, and because it was not held in person at the May 18 cemetery, but was broadcasted via TV. This text was nonetheless included in the corpus because the speech had a very similar function compared to the commemorative speeches, and because its inclusion allows for a more complete view on the characteristics differences and commonalities of the political remembrance regarding the Kwangju Uprising across political camps. As will be shown below the speech by President Kim Young-sam exhibits traits typical for both conservatives' as well as liberals' speeches.

most decisive distinction is based on the differences between the political camps, which will be examined below by examining the speeches in qualitative terms.

Figure 1. Presidents' Commemorative Speeches at the May 18th National Cemetery¹³



¹³ The dotted line represents the average speech length or 628.9 words.

Regarding the basic performative function of a commemorative address, all the speeches in this sample are in line with the basic discursive strategy, which from the perspective of the present moment relate to past events, attribute great significance to lessons learned, and appeal to the audiences based on that spirit to make efforts jointly to meet future challenges. All the speeches are presented from the perspective of the president speaking for the whole nation, and most include some emphasis on personal and/or emotional involvement with the event and actors. In all cases, the event and its values are related to the government and its activities. As for the macro-structure, all presidents begin their commemorative speeches by saluting the “citizens (*kungmin*),” “Kwangju citizens (*Kwangju simin*)” and “Cholla province citizens (*chölladomin*)” address the “bereaved (*yugajok*),” as well as address the “invalids (*pusangja*),” and pray for the repose of the “souls of the deceased (*yŏngnyŏng*).”¹⁴ They all put each anniversary’s occasion into

¹⁴ Only President Kim Young-sam does not refer to the souls of the deceased, which can be explained by the fact that his address was not explicitly a commemorative speech, and not held at the cemetery.

context by referring to the respective number of years that have passed since the Kwangju Uprising and point out that laying the cornerstone for democracy is the movement's major achievement. All presidents emphasized the "sacrifice (*hisaeng*)," "suffering (*ap'um*)," "pain (*kot'ong*)," "alienation (*sowoe*)," "discrimination (*ch'abyöl*)," and/or "sadness (*sulp'um*)" that the deceased and bereaved have experienced.¹⁵ In addition, all speeches include some expression of appreciation or praise for what the movement's participants have accomplished through the struggle. Finally, all speeches call upon the audience to take this commemoration and the honored values as a lesson to overcome social or political conflicts and cleavages, and to make an effort toward some kind of integration and unity.¹⁶

¹⁵ Two exceptions are the speeches by Kim Young-sam and Park Geun-hye which are the only ones that do not include references to alienation and discrimination.

¹⁶ Again, it is Kim Young-sam who is less explicit in this regard, however, does allude indirectly to the same notion when he speaks of "all of us (*uri modu*)."

To summarize, at first glance, all presidential speeches on the Kwangju Uprising conform to the basic function, structure, and statements for commemorative addresses in general. The occasion is used to remember, honor, and acknowledge the sacrifices of the deceased and bereaved for the good of an important cause as a way of re-confirming values shared by the imagined community of the (South) Korean nation, and at the same time tap into this potential source of power for mobilizing the people to support further progress and improvements collectively.

Characteristic Differences

A more detailed analysis of the speeches reveals several characteristic differences between the progressive presidents' speeches and those by the conservative presidents. One of the most evident differences is the different emphasis on the past, present, and future. While the progressive presidents' speeches tended to put greater weight in their addresses on describing and explaining past events and their aftermaths, as well as their lessons for the present and future, Presidents Lee and Park focus comparably less on "where we are coming from" and concentrate more on "where we are supposed to be going." Put differently, statements regarding the evaluation of past events are far more elaborate and detailed in the progressive presidents' speeches compared with those by conservative presidents. While the conservative presidents

also expressed sympathy toward the victims and the bereaved, along with appreciation and praise, the progressives not only devote more words to these topics, but also are far more nuanced regarding the variety of empathetic expressions used, as well as in explaining the circumstances under which the uprising occurred. For example, conservative presidents' range of expressions is limited to statements that they "think proudly (*charangsüröpke saenggakhanda*)" of what the Kwangju people have achieved; that they "will ruminate on the meaning (*üimi-rül toesaegi'myō*)" of the Kwangju spirit; and that it "was wise (*chihyerōwössümnida*)" of the Korean citizens not to forget these accomplishments. Meanwhile, progressive presidents are far more explicit in "being moved by (*kamdong*)," "thanking (*kamsa*)," "admiring (*chon'gyōng*)," "respecting (*kyōngüi*)," and "praising (*ch'anyang*)" the Kwangju people's deeds and "courage (*yonggi*)." Similarly, when it comes to honoring the Kwangju people's sacrifices in 1980, the conservative presidents' vocabulary is limited to "sacrifice," "suffering," "alienation," "discrimination," and "sadness," while progressive presidents employed much more varied and explicit terms that expressed deeper empathy and understanding, such as "hardship (*konan*)," "feeling of unjust treatment (*ōgurham*)," "sadness (*sōrō'um*)," "shock (*ch'unggyōk*)," "feeling of powerlessness (*muryōkkam*)," "anguish (*koerō'um*)," "wounds (*sangch'ō*)," "scars (*sanghün*)," "anger (*punno*)," and "shame (*puggūrō'um*)."

Moreover, progressives in their speeches do not stop at describing the emotional dimension of the suffering then and today, but also explicitly name immediate factors that caused these hardships by detailing the "violence (*p'ongnyōk*)" in more specific terms, including "sexual violence (*sōngpongnyōk*)," "barbarous violence (*yaman-jōk p'ongnyōk*)," "massacre (*haksal*)" and "secret burials (*ammaejang*)" of the dead, which are clearly described not only as a "tragedy (*pigŭk*)," but also as an "injustice (*purŭi*)" and "unlawfulness (*pujōng*)." Progressive presidents are also far more explicit when it comes to naming and clearly characterizing government authorities' role in these actions. The actual circumstances and causes behind these actions are spotlighted when they explicitly emphasize the nature of "dictatorship

(*tokchae*),” “unjust state authority (*purüi-han kukkagwöllyöök*),” and “rule under dark dictatorship (*amhük kat’ün tokchae-üi ch’iha*),” “military dictatorship (*kunbudokchae*),” “dictatorship time (*tokchaesidae*),” or “in the darkness of ferocious dictatorship (*sösülp’örön tokchae-üi ödum sok*).” Finally, again, only the progressive presidents’ speeches mention continuing atrocities by other means in the form of “distorting (*waegok*),” “denouncing (*maedo*),” “denigrating (*p’yömhwe*),” “appalling remarks (*mangön*),” “insulting (*moyok*),” “negligence (*pangch’i*),” “political maneuvering (*kongchak*),” and “still not yet established truth (*ajikto kyumyöng-doeji mothan chinsil*)” or “true picture (*chinsang*).”¹⁷ It was President Moon, in his 2019 address, who was the first president who explicitly said that he, as a citizen and human, “feel(s) sorry (*mianhamnida*)” for what happened, and that he “as president representing the nation deeply apologize(s) (*kip’i sagwadürimnida*) for the then authorities who committed such barbarous violence and the massacre.”

¹⁷ The only exception is Kim Young-sam’s speech, which at some point explicitly speaks of the events as the “bloodshed of Kwangju (*kwangju yuhyöi*)”, thereby vividly depicting the brutal quality of the uprising’s suppression. But other than that, Kim, too remains silent on all the other details regarding background and context of the events.

Conservative presidents do briefly mention the Kwangju people’s suffering and achievements, but they do not elaborate on the causes of this hardship and simply omit the actual reasons why people were afflicted, while the progressive presidents not only shared their accounts of various aspects of the involved people’s ordeal and provided a clear and critical evaluation of the causes, but also pointed out ongoing distress due to attempts to distort history. This makes their empathetic remarks more authentic because their words are related to the causes of the injustice and suffering, thereby providing a far more credible foundation for the second, mobilizing part of the commemorative speech.

¹⁸ He does, too, state that the “will of the May 18 Kwangju citizens must be honored by achieving a great leap toward economic prosperity” through economic reforms and that a “concerted effort must be made for building an information power nation (*chöngbo’gangguk*),” while stressing the need for strengthening “productive welfare (*saengsan-jök pokchi*).” He also mentions the importance of improving relations with North Korea. However, all these rather indirectly related issues are dealt with only briefly and comprise only a very small portion of the future projects related to the commemoration.

Another set of characteristic differences lies in the fact that progressive presidents tended to link the commemorated events, actors, and actions directly to related social efforts, and less so to state projects that are indirectly related to the movement’s causes or values. For example, President Kim Dae-jung stresses government undertakings, such as passing laws on both compensation for people related to the movement, as well as human rights, as important projects that further participatory democracy in Korea.¹⁸ Similarly, President Roh, in his 2003 speech, spotlights core programs

in his administration, such as participatory democracy, balanced development, and peace and prosperity in the Northeast Asian region as tasks to accomplish toward “finally completing the Kwangju democracy movement,” but does so in no more than four lines. In his 2005 and 2006 speeches, Roh focuses only on the importance of civil society in the sense of realizing the idea of the people’s sovereignty as a decisive force and social equity as a crucial principle to improve on the country’s advancement. Similarly, President Moon, in his 2017 speech, does not mention any government project, though he relates the Kwangju movement’s spirit¹⁹ to the candlelight demonstrations that “opened an era of people’s sovereignty (*kungmin’jugwǒnsidae*).” In his 2019 speech, the only references to government policy concern praise for how well the City of Kwangju is coping with issues of economic democracy by way of creating “Kwangju-style jobs (*kwangjuhyǒng iljari*)”, and that the government will support the city in making its dreams come true. President Kim Young-sam in 1993, of course, was most explicit on measures to be taken that address redemption. It was before even prosecuting the perpetrators, and a lot had still to be done in this respect. That is why in his speech he allocates more than one third of the text to directly related measures by the government. This includes pledges to enact an official memorial day and to construct a memorial park for “paying tribute to and holding high the Kwangju Democracy Movement’s spirit and honor”, and to compensate (*posang*), rehabilitate (*pokwǒn*), restore (*hoebok*), and reinstate (*pokchik*) those who suffered according hardships as a result of the events.

However, this noteworthy conciliatory emphasis is immediately followed by an even stronger admonitory statement not to pursue further truth finding and punishing perpetrators. He argues that it is not the time to “expose the indignity of the dark days, which leads to the revival of conflict or to calls for punishing somebody”, that “hatred (*mium*)” and “conflict (*kaldǔng*)” must be stopped, and that “retaliating revenge (*pobok-jǒk hanp’uri*)” must not happen. He goes on to say: “[L]et us all daringly forgive but not forget, and by so doing reestablish reconciliation.” In other words, Kim Young-sam argues that the Kwangju people should

¹⁹ A more detailed account on the “Kwangju Spirit” can be found at Lewis (2002, 144–151).

unconditionally forgive, of course without forgetting, but also without coming to terms with the past, because the time is not ripe yet. What is more, after having made this bold statement he turns straightaway to appealing for his actual interest, that is “creating a New Korea (*sinhan’guk ch’angjo*)”, a notion he repeats five times in his concluding remarks, where he also presses the Kwangju people further by saying that they must not “cling to the past (*kwagō-e maedallyō*)”, but “let go of their bitter feelings and deep resentments (*anggūm-gwa han-ül hulhult’ōl-go*)” to hand down to their descendants an “affluent (*chalsanŭn*)” country that they will be proud of.

One, two decades later, Presidents Lee and Park follow a resembling script, though less drastic because meanwhile the main perpetrators were punished, truth finding advanced, and the overall institutionalization of the Kwangju narrative has matured over time. Nonetheless, the two speakers spend the whole second parts of their speeches advertising their visions of the country’s future and how the Kwangju movement’s spirit fuels them. President Lee’s key message is to make Korea into a “first-rate advanced country (*sōnjinillyu’gukka*),” a term that he uses—in variations—seven times in his short text.²⁰

²⁰ Meanwhile, only Presidents Kim and Roh (2005) used the term “advanced country,” but in a quite different way when they speak of an “advanced human rights nation (*in’gwōnsōnjinguk*)” (Kim) and a “South Korea in which a mature democracy is blooming and which is advanced (*sōnjinhanguk*)” (Roh).

“Now the spirit of May 18 as such already has become a precious asset, but we must sublimate this into energy for state development. We must move forward to developing May 18 where democratization has fully bloomed into a mental anchor to building a first-rate advanced country. [...] To do so, we must not look at the past but at the future, and we must change through creativity and pragmatism. [...] I earnestly plead you, too, to partake in the endeavor to sublimate the spirit of the May 18 democracy movement into an energy for national integration.”

Similarly, President Park’s key concept is “state development (*kukkabaljōn*),” which she mentions five times in the second, appellative part of her speech:

“To open such a future, we must overcome region(alism),

overcome pain, and all gather our power for a dynamic development of the Republic of Korea. I think that now the May 18 spirit must be sublimated into national integration and national happiness. [...] I ask you who have made precious sacrifices and suffered pain to take a leading role in this journey.”

As can be seen, President Lee, at the end of his speech, after having stressed the importance of developing into an *sŏnjinillyugukka* and enumerating his government's various development support projects for the City of Kwangju, “earnestly pleads” with Kwangju's citizens to “partake in the task to sublime the May 18 Democracy Movement's spirit into energy for national integration.” President Park states, “The May 18 spirit must be sublimed into national unity and national happiness” to achieve the aim of *kukkabaljŏn* and asks those “who have honorably sacrificed and suffered for democratization to take a leading role in this endeavor” of national development. While there exists a difference in degree, the way they attempt to convince their audience of looking forward not backward resonates with Kim Youngsam's line of argument to not cling to the past if a *sinhan'guk* was to be achieved.

Here it is noteworthy that due to conservative presidents giving the past short shrift in their speeches, touching on the causes, processes, consequences, and meaning of the Kwangju Uprising only briefly, they do not provide any concrete elaboration on what the May 18 spirit stands for besides having “made sacrifices,” “achieved progress of democracy,” or “taken the lead for justice and truth.” However, President Kim Daejung was quite explicit in enumerating the various aspects of the Kwangju movement's spirit, speaking about human rights, non-violence, citizens (*simin*), and peace spirit, which he each briefly explains and argues as follows: “These great spirits of Kwangju are not only our pride, but is the pride of all people in the world who believe in and esteem human rights and democracy as values of human mankind. Because the very actions of the Kwangju people were an epic human victory in showing how a great choice one can be made even under such extreme circumstances.”

Admittedly, while President Kim is the only speaker who so explicitly elaborates on the May 18 spirit, nonetheless, the other progressive presidents do provide statements that allow for inferring the meaning of the Kwangju spirit by explaining the circumstances that the Kwangju people faced, how they dealt with them, how they suffered from them, and what the meaning of the movement is. Meanwhile, the conservatives chose not to discuss these aspects at all. Furthermore, progressive presidents link the May 18 spirit mainly to the further development of democracy, human rights, and social justice, and only based on that speak of national development. A related striking difference is the emphasis on the lesson that the whole society can learn from Kwangju to achieve these objectives, rather than calling upon the Kwangju people to take the lead in doing so. Progressive presidents more often than not explicitly stress the actuality of Kwangju and its being alive, compared with conservatives' leave-the-past-behind rhetoric. For example, President Kim states, at the end of his speech: "May 18 will live on in our hearts forever. It will become an immortal torchlight that lightens for us all the democracy's way ahead. Also, it will lead the way for the nation to prosperity and unification. [...] Together with you, I will (be) at the head of the line with all my soul and might make the utmost efforts."

Similarly, President Moon, in his 2019 address, states:

"The historic burden Kwangju is carrying is too heavy. This burden must be shared by all citizens who saw and experienced that year's May (in) Kwangju. Kwangju's self-respect belongs to history, it belongs to the Republic of Korea, and it belongs to all citizens. It will bring happiness when we together cultivate and grow the seeds of democracy sewn by Kwangju. I hope that our May will shine every year and that it will become a power for all citizens to meet the future."

A quite obvious difference between the two groups of presidents is that not only do the conservatives use a far larger share of their speeches to mobilize the citizenry to support government projects, drawing on the Kwangju spirit, but they also try to link future issues to the past that have

little connection to the Kwangju Uprising and its values.

In addition, in the conservatives' speeches, the spirit of the Kwangju Movement and the overcoming of conflict in society apparently are viewed primarily as a conduit through which to achieve practical objectives, and less so as a goal in itself. All presidents seem to agree on the importance and need to overcome cleavages and conflicts, and to integrate society by focusing on "national integration (*kungmint'onghap*)," "integrating society (*t'onghap-hanun sahoe*)," and "all citizens must become one (*on kungmin-i hana-ga toeöya*)," or stating that "it is time that all of us gather our power (*uri modu-ga him-ul han de moaya hal ttae*)." However, not only do the conservatives stress economic development over anything else as the final purpose of this integration, but they also reduce the need for national integration to this narrow purpose. While Lee and Park simply failed to provide further explanations as how to achieve reconciliation, and directly jump to national integration, Kim Young-sam uses the term "reconciliation (*hwahae*)" not less than three times, but as we saw earlier denies the most crucial condition for reconciliation—coming to terms with the past, and holding accountable the perpetrators.²¹ Meanwhile, progressive presidents pay great attention to "social integration (*sahoet'onghap*)," which presupposes the important task of "reconciliation (*hwahae*)," "concord (*hwahap*)," and other related attitudes and behaviors, such as "dialogue and cooperation (*taehwa-wa hyömnnyökh*)," "dialogue and compromise (*taehwa-wa t'ahyöph*)," "respect and concession (*chonjung-gwa yangbo*)," "consensus and generosity (*hapui-wa kwanyong*)," and "forgiving (*yongsö*)." They view these not only as preconditions for any other developments, but also as important objectives in themselves. The conservative presidents do not touch on these issues at all, but the progressive presidents refer to the spirit of the May 18 Democracy Movement as a source for unity and integration by way of cherishing and following it in the whole of society—not as a way to request that Kwangju citizens proactively exploit this spirit to support government projects. On the contrary, their focus lies in emphasizing the value of the movement's spirit, and that all citizens should embrace

²¹ The reference material to Kim Young-sam's speech, probably prepared by his aides, is even more explicit when it refers to the related public hearings that took place in the National Assembly, which "excessively occupied with truth finding", which may have the effect of "spoiling citizens' harmony and amplify conflict".

the common effort of unity and integration. Here, the nuance is important in that these speeches stress that society must learn the lesson and carry on the May 18 spirit.

5. Conclusion

This article set out to answer the question of how Korean presidents have been engaging in remembrance discourse concerning the May 18 Kwangju Democracy Movement and how this relates to the overall polarizing discourse competition between the two political camps. The analysis of the 11 presidential commemorative speeches revealed distinctive characteristics of the progressive presidents on one side and the conservatives on the other. In quantitative terms, conservative presidents Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye chose to make such speeches much more rarely than the other presidents. Only once during their terms did they travel to Kwangju to make a commemoration address. In addition, their speeches were significantly shorter than those of progressive presidents. In qualitative terms, conservative presidents limited themselves to brief and abstract mentions of the Kwangju Uprising, the people's sacrifice and suffering, and the uprising's meaning for democracy. Meanwhile, progressive presidents were far more concrete, detailed, and empathetic in how they elaborated on these aspects. This also applies to their elaborations on the tragedy's causes, citizens' (re)actions, lessons learned, and the spirit of the movement, which their conservative counterparts completely leave out. In addition, progressive presidents only briefly mentioned macro-state projects of mostly economic origin and instead spent more time on directly related matters, such as remembrance, democracy, human rights, and civil society. Regarding future-related directives and expressive speech acts, conservative presidents simply called for overcoming conflict to achieve national unity mainly as a basis for national and economic development. Meanwhile, progressive presidents provided a more nuanced and elaborate discussion of overcoming conflicts and accomplishing social integration through

dialogue and reconciliation. In summary, conservative presidents' speeches are reduced to a bare minimum of the formal requirements for a commemorative address, while progressive presidents' speeches are considerably more authentic, referring to established knowledge about the uprising, and in their totality, are more credible.

These clear differences between the two groups of presidential addresses match the differences between other policies and activities during their respective incumbencies regarding the Kwangju Uprising, as well as related controversial political issues. As elaborated on above, under the administrations of the two conservative Presidents Lee and Park, members of the revisionist New Right movement were close to the government, and school history textbooks' descriptions of the Kwangju Uprising were reduced in quantity, as well as quality, and the song "March for the Beloved," which represented the Kwangju Movement, officially was banned, or at least not allowed to be part of the official commemoration ceremony at the May 18 Kwangju National Cemetery. To this day, conservative politicians and activists repeatedly make defamatory remarks on the Kwangju Uprising. In this way, the conservative presidents' commemoration speeches—whether consciously intended or not—fit well into the overall post-democratic tendencies in Korea promoted by conservatives' challenging activities. While the conservative presidents' commemorative addresses do not deny or reject the Kwangju Uprising's meaning and achievements, they refrain from explicitly describing the causes and consequences, and based on this streamlined account of the uprising, they call for national integration, leaving out the necessary process of reconciliation.²² In other words, this discursive strategy of abstract, synoptic communication is part of the depoliticization phenomenon that, in this case, includes a danger to forestall critical demands to account for the causes and consequences of the Kwangju Uprising, and thus to frustrate reconciliation. Since, reconciliation presupposes facing the truth, holding accountable, showing remorse, and (then) forgiving.

²² President Kim Young-sam's address was an extreme case in this respect, because it argued for suspending truth finding and punishment of those responsible. Of course, this is owed to the immediate context in which he was situated, that is having good intentions as a former democracy movement leader and at the same time having to struggle for sufficient power as a president elected by the conservative camp, and still before even officially holding perpetrators responsible. In this way, Kim Young-sam's speech is an illustrative example for the sources of the two different takes on the remembrance of the Kwangju Movement as they were found in this analysis.

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