South Koreans protest against the mishandling of the deaths of two Korean students caused by U.S. Army, 2002-2004

*Time period notes:* Although the National Commission on the Killings of Two Middle School Students declared the termination of the campaign on June 13, 2004 (during the second anniversary of the deaths of Shin and Shim), the popularity and fervor of the campaign largely faded after late January of 2003. Although many people gathered in the first and second anniversary candlelight vigils (13 June 2002, 13 June 2003) to commemorate the deaths of Shin and Shim, it was more of a public mourning event than the direct protest against the US Army.

June 2002 to: June 2004

**Country:** South Korea

**Country:** United States

**Location Description:** The campaign was nationwide event that involved many major cities in South Korea. The most crucial location (for both symbolic and practical significance) that captured the attention of the media and public were squares and streets near Gwanghwamun, Seoul for three reasons: 1) The place became a symbol for democratization movements during 1980s. 2) The place gained significance as the space for public gatherings as it was used for public cheering for the World Cup in 2002. 3) It was very near the U.S. embassy.

**Goals:**
Although the goals of the campaign varied widely from the Anti-American citizens' demand for the U.S. military's pulling out of Korea to the moderate political leaders' soft demand for an apology by U.S. government officials, the goals that leadership positions of the campaign pursued can be listed as follows:

1. U.S. military stationed in South Korea hand the jurisdiction of the case regarding the deaths of Mi Sun Shim and Hyo Soon Shin to South Korean courts.

2. Korean government and the U.S. government agree to amend the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) so that U.S. soldiers who commit crimes against Koreans cannot be immune from prosecution in Korean courts.


**Methods**

Methods in 1st segment:
• 001. Public speeches
• 002. Letters of opposition or support
• 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
• 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
• 010. Newspapers and journals
• 011. Records, radio, and television
• 016. Picketing
• 043. Political mourning
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support
• 048. Protest meetings
• 121. Refusal of public support

Methods in 2nd segment:

• 001. Public speeches
• 002. Letters of opposition or support
• 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
• 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
• 010. Newspapers and journals
• 011. Records, radio, and television
• 016. Picketing
• 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
• 034. Vigils
• 036. Performances of plays and music
• 037. Singing
• 038. Marches
• 043. Political mourning
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support
• 048. Protest meetings
• 063. Social disobedience
• 071. Consumers' boycott
• 072. Nonconsumption of boycotted goods
• 121. Refusal of public support
• 184. Defiance of blockades
• 196. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws

Methods in 3rd segment:

• 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
• 034. Vigils
• 037. Singing
• 043. Political mourning

Methods in 4th segment:

• 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
• 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
• 034. Vigils
• 037. Singing
• 043. Political mourning

Methods in 5th segment:
- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 043. Political mourning

Methods in 6th segment:

- 018. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
- 034. Vigils
- 037. Singing
- 043. Political mourning

Notes on Methods:
1. On 21 November 2002 and 7 December 2002, Pastor Han, one of the religious leaders of the campaign, bit his finger and wrote bloody messages/demands in front of the American institutions.

2. By the court day (17 November 2002) NCK activists had distributed more than a million leaflets. The wide distribution of the leaflets was conducive to stimulating the attention of the media, which had largely neglected the issue beforehand.

Classifications

Classification:
Defense

Cluster:
Democracy

Group characterization:

- Journalists
- NGO activists
- Politicians
- citizens
- netizens
- religious organizations
- students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
National Commission on the Killings of Two Middle School Students (NCK)

Pastor Sang Ryul Han and Catholic Priest Jung Hyun Moon

Netizen's National Commission on the Killings of Two Middle School Students (NNCK)

Partners:
Press

External allies:
Young Ghil Kwon and Moo Hyun Roh (presidential candidates of the minority party)

Involvement of social elites:
Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Journalists
- NGO activists
- Students
- citizens
- religious organizations

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- netizens
- politicians

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

*Segment Length:* Approximately 4 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**
U.S. military and government

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**
Not known

**Campaigner violence:**
There were some reports of the clashes between auxiliary police forces and the protesters.

**Repressive Violence:**

1) It had been reported regularly that the auxiliary police force beat up the demonstrators with their shields.

2) The U.S. soldiers in Camp Casey beat up demonstrators. Their violence was exposed to the public due to the severe treatment of one journalist. Amid the rally, two soldiers hauled the journalist (from Min Jung Sori Daily Newspaper), tied his hands with an iron cable and forced him to kneel down. Such mishandling by U.S. soldiers captured the attention of the media and became publicized nationwide.

Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**
2 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**
0.5 points out of 1 point

**Growth:**
3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:
The campaign succeeded in gaining the nationwide public attention and its denouncement for the mishandling of the deaths of Shin and Shim by U.S. army. While it can also be credited for making the public be largely aware of the inherent problem in the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), it failed to force the American government to amend SOFA. While the U.S. embassy made a slightly apologetic gesture regarding the incident, the public was unsatisfied with it.

The U.S. Armed Forces had been stationed in South Korea since the end of Korean War in 1954. More than 26,000 soldiers resided in six camps. Heavily dependent on the U.S. military support, the Korean army had an symmetrical relationship with the U.S. The two countries agreed that the U.S. military would assume the Wartime Operational Control (WOC) until 2015. Moreover, the Status of Force Agreement (SOFA) validated extraterritorial jurisdiction for the U.S. soldiers stationed in Korea.

On 13 June 2002—at about 10:00am in the morning—an armored vehicle of U.S. Army ran over two Korean girls, Hyo Soon Shin and Mi Sun Shim, and crushed them to death. The incident took place 10 miles north of Seoul, in a narrow two-lane road that had no sidewalk. While these two girls were walking along the shoulder of the road, a 60-ton AVLM, which ran in the front of the line of army vehicles heading for a training exercise, had its width extended beyond the lane.

The chief of staff of the 2nd Infantry Division attended the funeral of Shin and Shim on 14 June, to express condolence and to compensate for their deaths. However, the incident could not be disentangled with such an effort due to several complications. First, the 2nd Infantry Division of the U.S. Army had not informed the villagers around the area of the military training beforehand. Second, it remained unclear whether the two soldiers responsible for the killings had done so intentionally or involuntarily (or could have avoided the incident if they had been more attentive). Third, these two soldiers were subjected to a U.S. court’s decision rather than that of a Korean court. When the bereaved families expressed these concerns to the chief of staff, he promised that they would be able to meet the commander of the division after the funeral, and clarify the issue. However, after the funeral was over, the 2nd Infantry Division overturned its promise and refused to hold a meeting between its commander and the bereaved families.

As the news of the incident spread around, local NGO activists began to organize the National Commission on the Killings of Two Middle School Students (NCK) to demand that U.S. Army make an inquiry into the incident and issue a public apology. NCK first struggled to publicize the incident; it believed that it would be hard to raise awareness during the time of the 2002 FIFA World Cup (held in Korea), when most of the public and media was paying attention to the performance of the Korean National Team. They initially directed the focus of the campaign at informing citizens of Uijeongbu (the nearest city to Camp Casey of the 2nd Infantry Division and where the incident happened) and the middle/high school students who could sympathize most with the deaths of two girls similar to them in age.

On 20 June, groups of students, citizens, and the NCK activists gathered in front of the front door of the 2nd Infantry Division and held the first rally and petition. As activists tried to reach the front gate of Camp Casey to deliver the letters of citizens’ denouncement on the U.S. army’s handling of the event, the Korean auxiliary police force rushed to the scene to thwart them. Students yelled to the policemen, “Brothers, why are you against the dear Koreans when you should be protecting us?”

The level of confrontation culminated on 26 June, when some infuriated crowds tried to break into Camp Casey to deliver the letters by cutting the wire entanglements. This time, even some soldiers entered the scene and aimed their guns at the rallying citizens. Some citizens even voluntarily placed themselves in front the muzzles and provoked these soldiers to shoot them. Amid the rally, two soldiers hauled a journalist (from Min Jung Sori Daily Newspaper), tied his hands with an iron cable and forced him to kneel down. Such mishandling by U.S. soldiers captured the attention of the media, and became publicized nationwide.

Pressured by citizens, the Ministry of Law of Korea made an unprecedented request to the U.S. government for transfer of jurisdiction over the criminal case of two accused soldiers on 10 July. While the contemporary Status of Force Agreement (SOFA) validated extraterritorial jurisdiction for the U.S. soldiers stationed in Korea, the Korean government was demanding an exception for this criminal case because of the gravity of the situation. But the government of the United States announced on 7 August that it was unable to hand over the jurisdiction of the case. It even disapproved the request for the attendance of a
member of the bereaved family and Young Ghil Kwon, a presidential candidate of a leftist minority party.

By the court day, 17 November, most Koreans knew about the deaths of Shin and Shim and paid attention to the decision of the court. NCK activists distributed more than 1 million leaflets, and major presses, which had largely neglected the case beforehand, started to cover the issues. Students, religious groups, and NCK activists set up a tent in front of Camp Casey (where the trial was held in the Camp’s martial court) and prepared to protest if the court ruled in favor of the soldiers.

After five days of the trial, the court ruled that the two soldiers were found not guilty. As the decision was announced, the campaigners began to rally around Camp Casey to protest against the rulings. Pastor Sang Ryul Han and Catholic Priest Jung Hyun Moon—two leaders of the NCK who represented the support of religious organizations for the campaign—tonsured themselves. Pastor Han even bit his finger and wrote, “Let the justice be done” with the spilling blood.

The citizens of Seoul also began to act on 23 November. 5,000 citizens gathered around the streets and squares near the Gwanghwamun district. They tried to break through the blockade formed by the auxiliary police force.

By this time, the immeasurable population of Korean netizens began to engage in discussing and debating the goals of the campaign and campaigning methods on the Internet. One netizen suggested that people hold candlelight vigils that would both sanctify the public mourning of the deaths of the two girls and lead a peaceful massive demonstration against the U.S. Army.

On 30 November, roughly 30,000 citizens gathered around the same place and held their first (in Korean history) candlelight vigil. Crowds lit the candles and sang the national anthem and other songs that were imbued with nationalism. Citizens also set up a stage—which they named “Citizen’s Platform”—that everyone could freely enter and voice their demands.

Among the citizens who attended the rally, the netizen-oriented participants established Netizen’s National Commission on the Killings of Two Middle School Students (NNCK) comprising of 70 related homepage leaders and members to systematically organize the campaign on the Internet. NNCK leaders provided nonviolence-oriented guidelines for actions, boycotted U.S. products (Coke, McDonald, KFC, etc), and stirred other netizens to participate in the campaign.

On 7 December, public candlelight vigils were held in 43 cities of Korea. The crowds gathered in Gwanghwamun broke through the blockade formed by the auxiliary police force and gathered in front of the U.S. embassy. This was the first time in Korean history that the demonstrators broke both the symbolic taboo and law that forbade rallies held near the U.S. embassy. One hundred young men tonsured themselves in front of the embassy, and many other people urged the officials in the embassy to apologize for the deaths and mismanagement of the deaths of Shin and Shim.

On the same day, Pastor Han, Catholic Priest Moon, and some other members of NCK went to Washington D.C. to deliver 1.3 million letters, petitions, and signatures of Korean citizens to U.S. President George W. Bush. Sitting in front of the fence of the White House, Pastor Han bit his finger again, and wrote a bloody letter demanding the president’s apology. But the officials of the White House refused to receive what the Korean delegation had brought.

The candlelight vigils culminated on 14 December. Under the label, “sovereignty restoration day”, citizens in 64 cities of Korea and 15 countries around the world participated in the vigils. Roughly 100,000 people attended the demonstration in Gwanghwamun, Seoul. The vigils also drew the support from presidential candidates (the national presidential election was scheduled on 19 December). Whenever Young Ghil Kwon and Moo Hyun Roh—candidates of the minority party who supported the campaign—appeared in the demonstration, they were highly applauded. But when Hoi Chang Lee, a presidential candidate from the dominant Grand National Party, which downplayed the candlelight vigils, appeared amidst the crowd, he was forced to leave and even pursued by some infuriated citizens.

The fervor of the campaign was maintained every weekend, until late January of 2003. The participation plummeted due to the obdurate refusal of the U.S. government to amend SOFA and the tepid response of the newly elected President Roh who had initially promised to represent the demands of the demonstrators. Moreover, there was a lack of consensus among the activists and citizens on what the exact goals should have been. Some moderates thought an apology made by the U.S. embassy was
sufficient; other anti-American extremists urged that the U.S. pull its troops out of Korea.

Another reason for the gradual decline of the campaign can be attributed to a stark contrast between the NCK activists and the netizen-oriented participants of the campaign since the candlelight vigils began on November 30, 2002.

Seemingly solidified on the surface, the campaign had seeds of discord from the beginning. While the NCK activists brought flags, pickets, loudspeakers as well as candles, most citizens who participated in the candlelight vigils brought just candles. While the NCK activists solemnly led the campaigners on the centralized stage, citizens set up their own stages called "Citizen's Platforms," in which everyone could enter and voice their own, often witty, concerns. But they mingled with one another on that day, singing the national anthem and waving flags.

However as the divide between the NCK and netizens became larger, one of the NNCK organizers suggested on 4 January that they hold separate demonstrations from the ones organized by NCK. As his suggestion became more and more popular, the netizen campaigners held separate demonstrations afterwards.

Despite the decline of public interest, NCK activists organized anniversary and bianniversary public mourning and candlelight vigils commemorating the deaths of the two girls on 23 June of 2003 and 2004. On 23 June 2003, the activists erected a memorial cenotaph (that resembled the shape of a candle) to honor the deaths of Shin and Shim and the effort of the citizens to participate in candlelight vigils. While many people attended the events, they did not deem it as a political campaign. There had not been a major amendment of SOFA regarding the criminal case of U.S. army in Korea until 2012.

Research Notes

Influences:

One of the reasons Gwanghwamun district was widely used as the space for candlelight vigilance was that it was a symbol for the people's democratic movement in 1980s. (1)

The method of candlelight vigilance in this campaign--employed here for the first time in Korean history--became one of the favorite methods that occurred recurrently afterwards. (2)

Sources:


*Picture of candlelight vigil can be found on: http://peacemaking.co.kr/print.php?no=166

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
Soul Han, 25/11/2012

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