Confucianism Defies the Computer

The Conflict within the Korean Press

A Gateway in Hawaii Between Asia and America
DAVID E. HALVORSEN

Confucianism Defies the Computer

The Conflict within the Korean Press

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This Special Report is one of a series produced by the staff and visiting fellows of the Special Projects unit of the East-West Center. The series focuses on timely, critical issues concerning the United States, Asia, and the Pacific and is intended for a wide audience of those who make or influence policy decisions throughout the region.

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Summary

Without knowing the force of words, it is impossible to know men.
Confucius (551–479 B.C.)

During the last five years the press has become one of the most influential institutions in South Korea. Millions of copies of 85 daily newspapers and one thousand weeklies find their way into the homes, hearts, and minds of Korea’s 43.5 million people.

The newspapers are growing in number of pages, diversity of content, and advertising. It has all come about since October 29, 1987, when new democratic reforms provided for freedom of the press, something that has been rare in Korean history. It is still a transition very much in progress, a transition that the Korean journalists themselves do not fully comprehend.

Controlled by outside powers or authoritarian regimes since the late 19th century, the journalists have reached back to the “habits of the heart” of the centuries-old Confucian philosophy to guide their modern-day newspapers. The valued bonds of friendship, the acceptance of money and gifts, a desire to be part of the ruling elite, conformity in society, and presenting only one point of view in a story are all legacies of the Confucian social constitution.

These traits are much different from those of American journalism that call for individual enterprise, insatiable curiosity, balanced news accounts, and a role as a surrogate of the people in monitoring government and those institutions that affect America’s democratic principles.

Because of their increasing influence, the Korean press can wittingly, or unwittingly, cause mischief in international as well as domestic matters. There is a steady drum of anti-Americanism in their writing that occasionally breaks out into a mighty clamor such as during the 1988 Olympic Games in Seoul.

Less apparent is the philosophical struggle in Korea in which the press is a major participant. It is a duel between the neotraditionalists and the progressives. The neotraditionalists, skillfully invoking the habits of the heart, want to return to isolationism with its concomitant disdain for foreign intrusion. The progressives advocate a role for Korea in the community of nations, a role that is fostered by strong economic incentives.

Amidst all this social turmoil, the press is rudely learning that the exercise of freedom is complex. It calls for decisions that the editors and reporters never had to make before. So ultimately it comes back to Confucius’s admonition: Do they know the force of their own words?
DAVID E. HALVORSEN was a research fellow at the East-West Center from October 1991 to March 1992. Prior to that he spent 10 months in South Korea on a Fulbright grant. During that time he interviewed more than a hundred Korean journalists, spent extensive time in Korean newsrooms, and lectured in various universities and newspapers throughout South Korea. It was a homecoming for Mr. Halvorsen, who had served in the U.S. Army in Korea from 1953 to 1955 and as civilian press officer for the United Nations Command in Korea from 1955 to 1960. Part of his early journalistic experience came when he worked part-time at night editing copy for the Korea Times, an English-language newspaper in Seoul. Mr. Halvorsen was graduated from the University of Missouri School of Journalism with a B.J. During his professional career, he was an assistant managing editor for the Chicago Tribune and editor of the San Francisco Examiner.
Prologue

Trepidation has been my sidekick in preparing this report on the Korean press. I have ventured into one of the most complex aspects of Korean society with the hope that my Western eyes do not betray me and that I have produced something more than just another foreign paper, shallow in its understanding of the deep-seated traditions and culture that guide these remarkable people.

I find some solace in a Korean folk tale about geomancy, the ancient craft wherein people believe that somehow their fortune is connected to Mother Earth. Therefore, it is important that their home and burial site be selected by a geomancer, a person with the ability to bring together wood, water, metal, earth, and fire in an alchemy that promises temporal and eternal happiness.

According to the tale, recounted in *Korean Folk Tales: Imps, Ghosts, and Fairies* (Charles E. Tuttle Co., Tokyo), a geomancer was out searching for a special place when he became hungry and sought the hospitality of a farmer. He found the farmer to be in mourning and also ascertained that no funeral arrangements had been made. He offered his services and selected a site where the farmer built a house and prepared a grave.

The geomancer said the farmer would have good fortune and this came to pass. However, he also warned the farmer that some day a stranger would appear and the stranger would tell the farmer to abandon the site and find another. The geomancer told the farmer to seek him out if such a stranger appeared.

Sure enough, after 10 years had passed, a stranger appeared and told the farmer to move his site. The farmer, remembering his instructions, sought out the geomancer, who confronted the stranger.

"Why did you tell the master to change the site?" the geomancer inquired of the stranger.

"The hill is a kneeling pheasant formation. If the pheasant kneels too long it cannot endure it, so that within a limited time it must fly," replied the stranger.

The geomancer laughed and said, "Your idea is only a partial view, you have thought of only one thing, there are other conditions that enter. Yonder is dog hill, and below is falcon hill and the stream in front is cat river.

"This is the whole group, the dog behind, the falcon just above, and the cat in front," the geomancer said. "How then can the pheasant fly? It dares not."

I hope I have seen more than the kneeling pheasant. I hope I have also seen the dog, the falcon, and the cat. If I have failed, I am sure there is a geomancer nearby who will enlighten me.
On the loading dock of the Korea Republic newspaper in Seoul, in 1953, several men stood around a large wooden crate that had just arrived by a cargo ship from the United States.

One took a prying tool and commenced to dismantle the box until it revealed hundreds of pieces of metal cast in many shapes and sizes. The men looked in wonderment at all the parts, then looked at each other. Before them reposed a disassembled linotype, the ungainly mechanical servant of generations of American newspaper systems that could produce hundreds of pieces of lead type in minutes, magically lining up words, sentences, and paragraphs in a libretto composed between man and machine.

Though the linotype was invented by Ottmar Mergenthaler in 1884, it was the first such machine to touch the shores of Korea. It should have been scant surprise that not a single person at the newspaper had the skill to assemble and operate the machine. Indeed, there was not a soul in all of Korea who could bring that linotype to life save one.

An inquiry to the United States Eighth Army, then present in considerable numbers since the Korean War had recently ended, produced a front-line soldier who thought he had the skill to assemble and operate the machine. He was reassigned to the relative comfort of Seoul to accomplish his specialized mission.
Lee Kyoo-hyun, whose distinguished journalistic career predates the arrival of the first linotype, often tells that story when he reminisces with journalists. His still-active career spans two-thirds of the history of modern newspapers in Korea.¹

By 1988, when Seoul hosted the 24th Olympic Games, South Korean newspapers were using advanced production equipment. The newspapers sparkled with high-quality color photographs and advertisements. Few American newspapers match such quality.

Acquiring new technology and promptly utilizing it posed no difficulty for the production of newspapers because there was no culture, no tradition involved. It was all new. High technology culture and tradition commenced when someone pushed the start button.

But in the newsrooms where the editors and reporters work, it is a different story. These men and few women trace their antecedents to the scribes, philosophers, and advisers of the royal court of the Chosŏn (Yi) dynasty. The culture of the computer, much like the typewriter before it, is not simply a modern technological device but an intrusion on their venerated heritage.

However, the adaptation to machines that process words electronically is a cameo of the difficult transition that is taking place in South Korean newsrooms since the enactment of a new freedom of the press law on October 29, 1987.² Never in the long history of the Korean peninsula has such a freedom of expression

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¹ Confucianism Defies the Computer

² Periodicals in Korea: A Decade of Growth
been conferred upon the people. There have been brief periods of press freedom, but they are only worthy of footnotes to history.\textsuperscript{3}

Since 1987 it has been a reality, though the journalists have found the holy water of their new blessing is laced with vinegar.

Censors no longer sit in each newsroom. Government agents no longer come in the night to ransack newsmen’s apartments and spirit them away for beatings and detention. Newspapers are not closed down because they have criticized a despot.

This is called the “Golden Era” of the Korean press. Hundreds of publications have been started, though many are fragile and some have already failed. Journalists are well paid and they enjoy and relish their prestige in a hierarchical society. Circulation of the major papers keeps increasing as the people seem absorbed in seeking every printed word.

All the news is not good, however. The comfortable cartels created by past authoritarian regimes to control the media provided good lives for many journalists. Publishers knew their profits were assured. Editors did not have to make difficult decisions on how to play the news because the government told them how to do it.

Now competition has started to diffuse the security of the cartel. Advertising that was shared equally by the big newspapers is now less certain. Advertisers are putting their money where they think it will be most effective. Those veteran journalists who did the bidding of the authoritarian regimes are struggling to keep their power, knowing they are called “collaborators” by younger staff members who embraced an idealistic rhetoric of democracy through the volatile student movement of the last three decades.

\begin{center}
\textbf{Korean Media Population, 1991}
\end{center}

\textbf{Population by Medium (Unit: Persons)}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>News Agency</th>
<th>Broadcast</th>
<th>Newspaper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>623 (1.84%)</td>
<td>12,308 (36.34%)</td>
<td>20,934 (61.82%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{Distribution by Area (Unit: Persons)}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Seoul</th>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>12,978 (62.0%)</td>
<td>7,956 (38.0%)</td>
<td>20,934 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadcast</td>
<td>6,594 (53.6%)</td>
<td>5,714 (46.4%)</td>
<td>12,308 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Agency</td>
<td>504 (80.9%)</td>
<td>119 (19.1%)</td>
<td>623 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,076 (59.3%)</td>
<td>13,789 (40.7%)</td>
<td>33,865 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{Source: Ministry of Information}

Imbued with the tribal memory of past government censorship, these veteran survivors now practice self-censorship, playing the news to manifest the wisdom and deeds of central authority.

Old customs of accepting gifts, the fellowship of press clubs (adopted from the Japanese), the writing from the heart instead of from the facts, and the role of being the consort rather than the watchdog of authority are all coming under question.

Modern societal issues of environment, health, women’s rights, and global issues of
world trade, fishing rights, and finances seem to baffle the journalists, who all have come out of an educational system that teaches conformity, not the Western trait of dispassionate curiosity and the practice of individual inquiry.

Before, American interests enjoyed an immunity from press criticism except for an occasional viral outbreak when an autocratic Korean ruler would sneeze in Uncle Sam's face. Now the anti-Americanism in the press comes from a more virulent strain that will probably have to run its course.

In short, press freedom has brought with it the complexities of a more open and responsible society.

The desire for Korean solutions to Korean problems requires the journalists to reach back to the 500-year reign of the Chosŏn dynasty, which collapsed of its own ineptitude in the 1890s. And in so doing, the press finds itself pinioned like a mighty Gulliver by the small-mindedness of Lilliputians.

Korean journalists, young and old, are proud of their lineage. They consider themselves members of the ruling class, like the privileged yangban society of the Chosŏn dynasty. The yangban—which literally means officials of the two orders—first came to prominence in the 13th century in the Koryŏ kingdom, located in the northern half of Korea. These were men either from military or civilian background who controlled the government. The yangban role was the same in the Chosŏn dynasty. "We are part of the ruling class," explained Lee Seh-yong, director of international relations for the Korean Federation of Press Unions, illustrating that it is not only management that has an affinity with the yangban society.

The senior writers among them filter their own opinions into their stories because they believe it is their role to advise, and in many cases please, the president.

It is a role similar to that of their yangban predecessors who wrote poems, essays, parables, and longer stories that obliquely, but effectively, were for the pleasure of royal eyes and ears. Criticism generally meant a short career for a scribe at the royal court, a pattern that came to repeat itself in the authoritarian regimes of the 20th century.

The press freedom law was part of a package of basic democratic reforms adopted on October 29, 1987. In full context, its effect to the present is really a faint tracing on the history of the Korean press, which shares in the doctrine of a hierarchical authority that wisdom and great deeds flow from top to bottom.
This cultural inheritance from the Chosŏn dynasty is difficult for Westerners to understand. Intellectually, foreign students of Korean history and culture can grasp why the Korean character is what it is, but they have considerable difficulty integrating that knowledge into cultural and commercial relationships. For example, American diplomats in Seoul attribute anti-American editorials and stories in the Korean press to a wave of nationalism, and with press freedom, the release of generations of pent-up frustration. Much of this frustration is as indiscriminate as pigeon droppings and of no consequence.

Often it does concern issues of considerable consequence. The Korean journalists do not respond to American entreaties to present both sides of the story. It simply is not in keeping with their traditions.

Such a situation frustrates diplomats and foreign businessmen alike when they read adversarial stories. It is particularly galling when news articles clearly have their genesis in some Korean government office. Most Korean journalists simply will not make an inquiry to get other views.

This becomes even more painful for career-minded diplomats and businessmen who must explain this dilemma to the home office in the United States. That “it is part of their tradition” is a response that holds little currency for advancement within the State Department or to become executive vice-president at corporate headquarters. However, it is accurate, pale as it seems.

At no time did this clash of cultures become more evident than the fall of 1990.

The National Council of Consumer Protection Organizations, described as private organizations of the people, inaugurated an austerity campaign. The purpose of the campaign, according to the council, was to restore frugality and decency as virtues of Korean life-style. Indeed, such virtues are intrinsic in the philosophy of Confucianism.

Banners were strung up in busy intersections. Pamphlets were handed out along the streets, and the National Cooperatives Federation published 700,000 copies of a comic book that contained a “Buy Korean Products” theme.

Meanwhile, the Korean government aligned itself with Japan and the European Community against the United States in favoring protectionism for agriculture, a heated topic at
the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Uruguay Round talks. The campaign was warmly supported by the Korean media.

A frustrated American Chamber of Commerce in Seoul, angry at what it perceived to be a government-orchestrated anti-import campaign, took its case to the American media by way of Washington, D.C. The U.S. government reacted strongly and won the American media to its view that the campaign was orchestrated by the Korean government and the private consumer groups were a front.

The Korean press described the United States as the original consumption-oriented Western capitalist society where consumption is considered a virtue. The same press described Korea as a struggling nation trying to cling to its frugal traditions of the past. One writer described it as a “shrimp among the whales.” This frugality campaign featuring America as the guy in the black hat preoccupied Korean newspapers for three weeks. Each article and editorial read like a morality play. Only, there were no names for the cast, and no speaking parts, but rather some cosmic source of information and insight.

This writer asked the U.S. Information Service director if any local journalist had asked the ambassador for a comment. He said there had not been a single query. The writer also asked a local newspaper business editor why he did not call the press attaché or the American Chamber of Commerce for a comment. He replied that it would be a waste of time, a comment that was most likely a euphemism for a reluctance to get all sides of a story.

Whatever the merits of the arguments, thoughtful and balanced discussion of the issues in the Korean press was rare. The press criticism of the American pressure virtually ended on December 2, 1990. That was one day after President Roh Tae-woo summoned his economic ministers to his office and told them to avoid “unnecessary” trade friction with the United States.5

The implication is that the editors got the message.

The First Newspaper

On April 7, 1896, Sŏ Chae-p’i1, a naturalized American citizen with the anglicized name of Philip Jaisohn, established the first general newspaper in Korea. It was a thrice-weekly publication with two pages printed in han’gıl, the Korean alphabet, so all the people could read it, not just the scholars learned in Chinese ideographs, and two pages in English. It was called the Tongnip Shìnmun, or in English, The Independent. Each year April 7 is commemorated in Korea as National Newspaper Day.

Dr. Sŏ had lived for 12 years in the United States, where he earned a medical degree and learned of American politics and newspapers. This was at a time when the Hearst and Pulitzer newspapers in New York City were engaged in an intense competitive struggle that later would be called the era of “Yellow Journalism” in America.

Clearly, his American experience influenced the guiding principles of Dr. Sŏ’s modest enterprise. He dedicated the newspaper to be a watchdog of government and enlightening for the people. But Dr. Sŏ must have realized he would likely run athwart of an autocratic government and its privileged classes since he put forth with each edition this prominent disclaimer: “Our readers must distinctly understand that we are in no sense responsible for the sentiments or opinions of our corre-
spondents, for the accuracy of their assertions, or for the deductions they may choose to draw therefrom."

Some extracts from The Independent are only of peripheral interest to this report, but they are still worth noting as a reminder of the historical value of old newspaper files. The editorial of Saturday, November 28, 1896, begins with these words: "The lack of education on the part of the Government officials causes all sorts of irregularities in the working of the Government machinery. The constant rumors of plots and conspiracies have a very injurious effect in the progress of the country. . . ." There are those who might argue that this paragraph sums up the plight of Korean rulers and governments throughout history.

The activities of Americans and other Western adventurers who found their way to Korea in the late 1800s to build a railroad and streetcar lines and become merchants make for fascinating reading. In an article on December 17, 1898, a writer describes walking up the New West Gate street and meeting Mr. J. L. Ferguson, the superintendent of construction of the Seoul Electric Railway. Mr. Ferguson describes the construction progress and is reported as saying the project would be completed by Christmas. This apparently was an optimistic report since the paper reported on December 20, 1898, that in regard to the railway "we were led into conclusions that are not entirely warranted by the facts."

A letter from a Mr. H. Collbran, otherwise not identified but apparently a man of authority, said the tracks and overhead wires were installed but were awaiting machinery from America for the power house.

In the news columns of The Independent a tradition was established that carries on today in Korea's modern newspapers. That is the announcements from the royal court. Under stark headings called "Department News" and "Government Gazette" the reader got terse reports about what the government was doing. For example, in the November 28, 1896, edition, it was reported that "the Minister of Justice, Mr. Han Kunsul sent in his resignation but His Majesty refused to accept it."

Also, "The Home Dep't issued an order to the Governors of the provinces stating that according to the newspaper reports the Magistrates collect revenues from the people from eighty cents to one dollar more than the amount authorized by the Government. The Governors are hereby instructed to investigate the matter thoroughly; and if they should find the reports correct, the names of the guilty Magistrates must be reported to the Dep't at once."

Here, the newspaper, like its American counterparts, takes some credit. To wit: "We are glad to see that the Home Dep't officials read The Independent."

In an editorial, Dr. Sō took note of the tradition of American Thanksgiving and commiserated that American families in Korea would have to do without the traditional turkey, but he optimistically suggested they could do nicely with a good-sized Korean "old hen."

Aside from personnel matters such as appointments, dismissals, and resignations, nary a name of any official is mentioned in the government pronouncements. Ninety-five years later, the newspapers essentially do the same thing though the headlines are more descriptive and the stories are longer and consist of more detail.

However, the stories still read like government decrees. Almost invariably, all official announcements or statements appear in the newspapers with the lead paragraph starting out with "The Government" or "The Minis-
try" doing something. The Hankook Ilbo and its English-language sister paper, The Korea Times, reported on June 26, 1991, problems with major housing projects. It was a top story that day and for several subsequent days.

The papers reported, "Amid mounting safety fears in the construction of apartments, the government has decided to begin thorough checkups on the buildings now under construction . . ." (English version).

Not a single name appears in the article. Later references are made to anonymous Ministry of Construction officials who will undertake the investigation. Routinely an anonymous source is attributed for a final and opinionated paragraph. In this example, "some critical analysts suggest that the apartment completion schedule in the five new towns should be slowed to keep pace with the progress of the overall economy."

Anonymous sources are not uncommon in the United States, especially in news matters involving the federal government where the media countenance a system of understood definitions of credibility that range from the highly authoritative or unimpeachable down to the usually reliable source. In journalistic terms it is sort of a grading system like an AAA or BB bond rating. Unimpeachable is the president or a cabinet member speaking. Usually reliable is somebody who claims to be "in the know."6

However, such a system is not defined in the same way in Korea. Everybody is anonymous, as is custom in Confucian tradition, unless it is absolutely unavoidable to use the name, or an official requests his or her name in the government announcement.

The practice of including a statement attributed to "some critical analysts" or "industry sources" can often be the view of the journalists writing the story. This is a common practice in Korean newspapers, though the journalists will admit it only privately.7

Dr. Sŏ found his career as a newspaper publisher to be a short one. He was forced out in 1897 by a pro-Chinese faction in the Privy Council and returned to the United States. The Tongnip Shinmun was placed under a caretaker management and ceased publication in December 1899.8

The first daily newspaper was established in April 1898 and lasted one year. The editor was Syngman Rhee, who won the favor of the U.S. government for his staunch anti-communist views following liberation from the Japanese at the end of World War II. He later became the first president of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Rhee’s newspaper sought political reforms, modernization, and independence for Korea. But when he became president in 1948, he had little tolerance for criticism in the press and even closed one newspaper.

In 1904, the Japanese took control of Korea as a protectorate. The Japanese military commander invoked prior censorship on the press.
For all practical purposes, it would not be until 1987, some 83 years later, that a Korean editor could sit in his newsroom and make his own decisions.

Except for brief periods, the nation was under the control of the Japanese, the Americans, or the authoritarian regimes of presidents Syngman Rhee, Park Chung-hee, and Chun Doo-hwan. Mr. Park and Mr. Chun both seized power through military coups. Press repression and manipulation were the normal situation. Undoubtedly, thousands of Korean journalists never experienced a single day in their careers when they were free of government mandates regarding what they could and could not write.

Somehow during this long, dark journey there were always a few journalists who resisted tyranny. And there were and are the survivors, those who went along with the power structure. In many cases, they benefited handsomely in wealth and prestige. It is one of the sources of friction between the old and young journalists today.

The Daehan Maeil Shinbo (Korea Daily News), established in 1904, named a British journalist, Ernest T. Bethell, as its editor, in the hopes the Japanese would leave him and the paper alone. The newspaper had both English- and Korean-language pages. Bethell hung a sign over the front door proclaiming “No Entrance to Japanese” and vigorously opposed the Japanese, who seemed to be puzzled about what to do with the rebellious Englishman. They even brought charges against him in a British consular court. Mr. Bethell, under constant harassment, finally resigned and went to Shanghai, where he died a few months later.

Mr. Bethell’s editorials were quite intense, as evinced in the opening words of this editorial dated January 31, 1905: “It really appears as though the Japanese are over reaching themselves in their haste to secure all the good things in Korea, and furthermore, it seems nothing short of a scandal that the Korean government should be compelled to pay a high salary to an official like Mr. Megata whose chief energies are directed to assist Japan in her schemes.” Mr. Megata was described as a clever financier who was attempting to shift Korean financial assets to Japan.

Newspapers were established in Honolulu, San Francisco, and Vladivostok, where there were Korean exile communities. Soon the Japanese were publishing 30 newspapers, 16 of which were dailies, in Korea. Only one Korean newspaper was allowed and it was the propaganda journal of the Japanese governor-general.

There were no radio or television stations, of course. The Korean people were totally isolated, not only from the world, but from each other in that they were denied all news except what the Japanese allowed. There has never been a comparable period in American history. It is difficult to comprehend the totality of the Japanese information control in the context of today’s instant global capability of the media.

The Samil Independence Movement of March 1, 1919, surprised the Japanese. Korean nationalists had managed to secretly organize mass demonstrations throughout the country, highlighted by the reading of a declaration of independence in Pagoda Park in downtown Seoul.

At first the Japanese vigorously cracked down on the movement, but as time passed the resistance only grew stronger. Then the Japanese eased up, even allowing establishment of three Korean-language newspapers. Two, the Dong-A Ilbo and the Chosun Ilbo, are among Korea’s leading newspapers today.

With a global war in the wind, the two papers
were closed in 1940. Following the unconditional surrender of the Japanese on August 15, 1945, and the liberation of Korea, the expectations for a free press were high. The Dong-A Ilbo and the Chosun Ilbo resumed publication and within a year 57 dailies and numerous weekly and monthly newspapers were established.\(^1\)

Even though the Americans were in control, the Korean press found its journey only slightly brighter. "From 1945 to 1948 was an agonizing period in the Korean press because of the strife between communism and conservatism," explained Kim Dae-jong, chief editorial writer for the Chosun Ilbo.\(^2\)

The U.S. Army Military Government in Korea invoked its Ordinance No. 88 to ban all communist and leftist publications, leaving only right-wing newspapers that supported Syngman Rhee's bid to become the nation's first president. It is a legacy that remains today.

Following the Korean War armistice in 1953, Mr. Rhee established two government newspapers: The Korean-language Seoul Shinmun and the English-language Korea Republic.\(^3\)

Lifting a page straight out of the history of the Choson dynasty, Mr. Rhee and his ministers regarded the press only as a vehicle to communicate their views and actions to the public.\(^4\)

Nominally, Mr. Rhee allowed freedom of the press, but it was a charade. He used the national security law, as did his successors, as a Sword of Damocles, poised over every newsroom. Those newspapers that unflinchingly supported Mr. Rhee prospered. Those that did not, such as the Dong-A Ilbo and Chosun Ilbo, were punished with suspension, and the Kyunghyang Shinmun was ordered to close in 1959.

Most journalists were poorly paid, demoralized, and lacked reporting skills and ethics. They had remaining only the faintest spark of courage, but when thousands of high school and college students led a national protest against the rigged reelection of Mr. Rhee in 1960, the press vigorously joined the charge.

"Rhee and the press had a falling out when the general election of 1960 exceeded all tolerances," Mr. Kim of the Chosun Ilbo said. "A strong military backed Rhee, but the Dong-A Ilbo and the Chosun Ilbo said, 'this was too much.'"

Mr. Kim says the press led the overthrow of the Rhee regime. Student leaders of that era said they led the movement. Scores of students lost their lives when they challenged bullets with their bodies. One point is clear, those newspapers that inspired the demand for Mr. Rhee to resign became the circulation leaders and broadened the protest from a student movement to a popular movement.

The nation got a new constitution and an absolute freedom of the press, unlike anything before or since. There was an explosion of new publications with the number of dailies increasing from 42 to 113 in a matter of months. Most disappeared as fast as they started because they were not financially viable. Fewer than a dozen were profitable.\(^5\)

Moreover, the press was not prepared to cope with its new freedom, Mr. Kim said. "We did not know how to handle the news. The students were chanting 'Let's go North,' and the press missed the opportunity to handle it responsibly." As it turned out, the student movement to go north gave Maj. Gen. Park Chung-hee, with the backing of the army, an excuse to overthrow in May 1961 the Second Republic of Prime Minister Chang Myŏn.

That was not all. Many journalists extorted privilege and money from government offices, businesses, and other organizations. Each story,
Korean Presidents and the Press

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Security Issues</td>
<td>Press Controlled</td>
<td>Press Controlled</td>
<td>Press Guided</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic News</td>
<td>Favorable Only</td>
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<td>Criticism of U.S.*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Protests</td>
<td>Downplayed</td>
<td>Downplayed</td>
<td>Major Play</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Both presidents Park and Chun used the press to sway Korean public opinion against certain U.S. policies they did not like.

President Roh’s administration still lets it be known to the press his priorities on national security and the economy. The press prudently follows this guidance through self-censorship. Mr. Roh’s administration was embarrassed in 1990 when it was discovered the government was keeping secret files on many journalists. Supposedly, the practice was halted.

it seemed, had a price tag. Heroes in 1960, they were seen as buffoons and thieves in 1961. The dark days were back and the press had contributed to their own undoing.

With the overthrow of the Second Republic a new era of press repression began. Gen. Park did not like the press. When he was a regional commander he saw the prevalent corruption in the provincial press. He had a ready-made excuse to suppress it.

“This was a harsh time. Park needed the press and eventually he learned to control the give and take with the press,” Mr. Kim said. “He was skillful.” He controlled the newsprint supply and advertising revenue and gave newspaper management special privileges in exchange for their support.

“Park was not interested in politics. He would let the newspapers write about politics,” Mr. Kim said. “But he would tolerate no criticism of his economic programs, the military, or himself. For example, he would not tolerate any criticism of his ‘New Villages’ program.” That was a massive rebuilding of villages.

Newspapers were closed. Sunday editions were abolished and weekday publication restricted. Owners, editors, and many reporters were arrested and imprisoned. Journalists were tortured. Some were beaten with rolled-up newspapers, and others had the bristles of their beards extracted one by one. Even their family members were threatened. The publisher of the so-called radical Minjok Daily was executed on a charge of “Special Anti-national Activities.”

Still, certain journalists and newspapers defied Park, reporting on scandals within his government. The Dong-A Ilbo even dared to criticize the much-feared Korean CIA for arresting and detaining journalists.

A period of despair came when the Korean Newspapers Association, the organization of daily newspaper publishers, caved in to the government. A similar situation occurred in 1987 when the newspaper editors’ association declined an appeal from the national lawyers’ association to take the leadership in a free press movement.
When Mr. Park’s wife was murdered in August 1974 in an assassination attempt upon his own life, the Korean leader changed, Mr. Kim said. He reportedly became a heavy drinker. His distaste for the press increased, and he became critical of American policies, so much so a conspiracy story still moves about in press circles. That story centers on Mr. Park’s assassination by his security chief on October 26, 1979. According to the conspiracy theory, the United States masterminded his assassination because he was becoming so obdurate. Such stories refuse to go away, like the Kennedy assassination conspiracy theories in the United States.

The stories of individual and newspaper resistance to President Park are endless. Reporters became so resourceful they would leak anti-Park stories to the foreign reporters, who were able to file stories for their own newspapers, magazines, or wire services. The stories would filter back to Korea.

After Mr. Park’s assassination, journalists once again became optimistic they could openly and freely practice their craft. But, like 1945 and 1960, it was a brief period of liberty.

Soon Maj. Gen. Chun Doo-hwan led a military junta that seized control. Censorship and reprisal again became a way of life for the media. Again certain newspapers fought back. The Kyunghyang Shinmun ran blank white spaces in the paper to indicate what had been censored. Once more, journalists were tortured. When he became president, Mr. Chun placed upon publishers the responsibility to keep their reporters in line. Many complied, and the ill-will of the reporters toward management exists to this day.

Both the publishers and the broadcast company chiefs agreed to purification of their staffs. Blacklisted journalists could find work only as laborers. News agencies were closed or combined. The same occurred to radio and newspapers, all to make central control easier.

Consistent with the history of Korea, the law is whatever the current ruler says it is. Gen. Chun was no exception. Eventually he placed in each newsroom agents who told the editors what stories to use and how to position them in the newspapers.

**Birthplace of Anti-Americanism**

Following a public uprising in Kwangju in May, 1980 in which 200 or more people were killed by Korean combat troops, Gen. Chun ordered the media to call the dissidents “bandits.”

If anti-Americanism in Korea had a birthplace, it was that bloody day in Kwangju. The perceptual damage was enormous and still is prominent in the minds of Koreans despite platitudes from both Americans and Korean officials that it is history.

Either skillfully or fortuitously, Gen. Chun involved the United States by requesting permission of the American ambassador and top military commander to move the troops of the Korean army’s 20th division to Kwangju. He did not need that permission since that unit was already under his direct control.

But the Korean populace, conditioned by 35 years of guidance from their American “big brother,” readily believed the United States could have stopped Gen. Chun. Maybe “big brother” could have intervened, but the Americans said they were caught by surprise and could not have done anything to halt Gen. Chun.18

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*Confucianism Defies the Computer*
With total control, Gen. Chun was able to keep American official protests and indignation out of the Korean media. Instead, he exploited the American involvement, such as it was, to deflect internal criticism of his tactics. He summoned publishers and editors and elaborated on American knowledge, thereby implying acquiescence, of all his major actions, including his seizure of power.19

It had to be the low point in Korean-American relations. The Korean media were merely a puppet on a string, incapable of independently sorting out the facts and letting the chips fall where they may.

Chun Doo-hwan, shortly after he was installed as president, became the first foreign chief of state to meet President Ronald Reagan. The meeting verified in the minds of the Korean people the collusion of the United States in the Kwangju uprising. The people had no way of knowing, and the press was not permitted to tell them, that Mr. Reagan had agreed to meet with Mr. Chun in exchange for a promise that Mr. Chun would spare the life of opposition leader Kim Dae-jung, then under a death sentence for sedition.

Nine years later, after Mr. Chun had left office in disgrace and gone off to a mountain monastery to atone for his sins, the U.S. government issued a white paper on its version of the Kwangju matter in which it argued it had used every diplomatic resource in an effort to halt Mr. Chun’s violent action. But anti-Americanism had exploded in many forms during the intervening years.

Meanwhile, compliant newspaper management just seemed to hunker down and allow events to run their course. The publishers and editors became wealthy under Mr. Chun. The cartel he authorized guaranteed handsome advertising revenues. Senior editors and writers lived in fine homes, sent their children to the best schools, obtained restricted foreign luxury goods, and had access to the high-ranking officials of government. Many hold forth today while those journalists who fought press controls under Mr. Park and Mr. Chun still find themselves outside the establishment press. There is bitterness and frustration.

When Roh Tae-woo, Mr. Chun’s hand-picked presidential designee, called for press freedom in 1987, it was 101 years after So Chae-p’il (Philip Jaisohn) founded the *Tongnip Shinmun*. During that first century, the press rarely experienced a day free of government control.

In a nation so proud of its homogeneity, the press is anything but. It was founded by an American citizen, Dr. So, who is believed to be the first Korean naturalized in America; it turned to a Britisher in a futile attempt to defy the Japanese; then it submitted to Japanese and American control before indigenous authoritarians took over.

So it is part American, a bit British, part Japanese, part authoritarian, and now under self-control. Most of all, it is Chosōn dynasty yangban guided by a tradition-bound Confucianist philosophy.

Shim Jae-hoon, Seoul bureau chief of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, himself twice imprisoned by authoritarian regimes, explained in an interview what the past century has done to Korean society, including the press.20 “The social and political aspects of Korea have not developed like the nation’s military and economy,” he said. “When Park Chung-hee took over, he turned to the military because it had the discipline and the managerial skills to lead the nation forward in its economic development.

“Even soldiers who came from the rural areas at least got the training and discipline in the army. However, because of this characteristic,
the political and social sides did not develop,” he said. “This was also true of the students. Eventually the students developed as undisciplined and not well educated and, of course, they became institutionalized as the so-called conscience of the nation.”

Mr. Shim talked of a “rage” in Koreans. “They seem to have this burning rage and it lashes out in many forms against the government.” He said he is not sure what causes the rage, but he believes the answer lies in the long historical suppression of the people.

Confucius: Editor-in-Residence

It would be convenient if the understanding of the newsroom culture could be found in a couple of keystrokes on a computer. No, this search must go through the symbolic back copies of pen-and-ink scrolls of the scribes of the 19th-century Chosŏn dynasty.

The outward traits of moral righteousness, deference to superiors, and politeness to avoid embarrassment are in vivid contrast to American values of independence, self-reliance, and creativity, generally summed up in the word individualism. The ghost of Confucius is an editor-in-residence in every newsroom in Korea.

How does this translate into journalistic practices? American newsmen and women are competitive and they vigorously pursue stories. They interview sources, they check documents and records, they are skeptical, they are always looking for the exclusive story, all in keeping with a tradition of being the watchdog of government and those institutions that affect the American democratic system of checks and balances. Simply put, the American journalists view themselves as surrogates of the people.

The Confucian tradition brings quite another person to the newsroom. The Korean journalist considers himself as part of the ruling class, not the voice of the people. Pronouncements from superiors are readily accepted without question; the journalists do not seek out exclusive stories lest they embarrass their fellow reporters, and anonymity is a virtue, thus eliminating the need for direct quotations and attributions. In summation, the Korean journalist sees himself as an adviser to the royal court. That advice can be critical as well as praiseworthy.

The press tradition is so intertwined with Korea’s hierarchical society and Confucianism that to make a course correction is not a simple matter of resetting the sails but rather a requirement to redesign the boat. There is little evidence that this will happen soon.

In the newsrooms, the reporters and senior writers take their pens and carefully write out their story for the day in Chinese ideographs and han’gul, the basic Korean phonetic alphabet. Though Korea’s students now use textbooks that read left to right and horizontal like American textbooks, the Korean journalist will move his pen to the upper right-hand corner of the page, writing vertically from right to left, just as the scribes of the Chosŏn dynasty did 500 years ago.

When he completes his writing, he hands it to a young woman. She sits before a computer, punching the keys that will electronically convey the ancient ritual of the pen to the computer typesetting equipment of the newspaper production room. The writers sit back in their chairs contemplating other matters, like the scribes of old sitting on a mountaintop, their minds uncluttered by the mundane clumsiness of electronic intrusion.
The Lesser Language

Han'gul is the basic Korean alphabet. It has 24 vowels and consonants. However, virtually all the major newspapers continue to use Chinese ideograms in addition to han'gul. Use of Chinese ideograms creates typesetting problems for the newspapers and gives them a sameness of appearance because of a limit on typefaces. Scholars call han'gul the lesser language, thus implying people who cannot read Chinese characters are not well-educated.

Senior newspapermen inject their own feelings of the heart into their writings. This is called writing with nunch'i. Much of this style of commentary is remarkably accurate and insightful, but a flaw in writing from the heart is misreading a serious case of dyspepsia as inspiration. Furthermore, since the newspapers lift stories from each other with abandon, a misguided literary missile launched by a known writer may never be detected as a dud.

Through the practice of nunch'i the writers rely heavily on birthplace, schooling, and friendships in assessing the character of newsmakers. If a new government appointment is made, they want to know his home city and province, what schools he attended, including primary, when he was graduated and who were his classmates. From this the senior writers deduce the character of the individual and what can be expected of him in his new post.

For example, newspaper writers often refer to the TK connection. President Roh Tae-woo is from the city of Taegu and Kyongsang province. If the president makes a political appointment, the first thing the writers want to ascertain is the TK connection. Other indicators include whether the appointee was a classmate of President Roh. When the embattled and discredited president of the Fifth Republic, Chun Doo-hwan, announced he was stepping down and picked Mr. Roh as his candidate, the writers quickly noted Mr. Roh and Mr. Chun were from Kyongsang province and mates in the class of 1955 at the military academy.

Because of this, they saw little hope for change, but President Roh surprised them. He did not follow the character role they had already assigned him because of his background. Rather, he announced a series of dramatic democratic reforms.

On the other hand, Kim Dae-jung, the perennial opposition candidate, comes from the Cholla provinces in southwestern Korea. People from this region are thought to be argumentive and lacking in sophistication. Thus writers will frequently refer to his Cholla background to explain certain of his actions.

An American writer reviews the public statements, political voting record, and ideology of a new official and draws his conclusions on that basis. Regionalism is a factor, but it is not given the importance found in Korea. The Korean writer determines a person's pedigree as the precursor of what he will do in government. The American writers look less at the pedigree and more at what the individual has done in public life.

Both systems seem to work, at least to the satisfaction of the respective writers, who have different habits of the heart. Given the homogenous character of its society, the Korean writers' system is more often than not on the mark.

Reporters and subeditors bow slightly on ap-
proaching senior editors. They stand with hands folded behind their backs listening to instructions or advice that is given in polite terms by the senior editors. Confrontation, common in American newsrooms, is rare in Korean newsrooms. Politeness and civility prevail on the surface even though there may be hidden feelings of anger.

The journalists normally work a six-day week, spending up to 12 hours a day on the job. However, it is acceptable for editors and reporters to doze in their chairs. It is also common to take a late afternoon break and go to a sauna, then return for the rush of the evening deadline. After that, it is off to the bars with workmates for several hours of drinking.

Within the media, nothing is more powerful than the press clubs. These clubs, known as kijadan, exist in city halls, police headquarters, and all the government ministries. They are the gatekeepers. A reporter must belong to the club or he does not get access to the newsmakers. The club members determine the membership. The press club is both fraternal and professional, and it exerts peer pressure on its members to share news with each other.

Reporters who are not on the approved list can be turned away from covering press conferences. Generally, separate press briefings are held for foreign journalists, so they seldom run into a conflict with this custom. One practical reason is the language barrier. The friendships are paramount. In most cases this is male bonding, and it is so powerful a relationship that the reporters share the news and will do nothing to embarrass a fellow club member.

This gives the government a form of press control. For example, when a minister issues a statement through his spokesman, the press club members take it and pass it on to their respective newsrooms. There is no effort to develop the story by calling other news sources.

If a reporter sought details beyond the content of the press release, he would ultimately have a more complete account. If this story appeared in his newspaper only, the other club members would be asked by their editors why they did not have such a complete story. This would be a loss of face. The personal relationships of the press club are more important than the individual enterprise needed to develop a complete story. This characteristic helps account for the tone of royal decree found in government announcements.

This press club bonding comes from one of the five fundamental relationships of Confucianism. To wit: "Between friends there should be faithfulness." These friendships are formed in school and become stronger than the ties that perpetuate the careers of American professional baseball managers.

"Schools, especially those above primary school, became, more powerfully than almost anywhere else, the focus of loyalties and group coherence," wrote Gregory Henderson, a specialist on Korea.

"Outstanding among these were the student and alumni bodies of Chosen's private high schools and colleges, both Christian and non-Christian. Given the lack, as De Tocqueville so beautifully puts the plight of the isolated man, of 'hereditary friends whose cooperation he may demand or class upon whose sympathy he may rely,' school friends, especially high school friends, became the young Korean's lifetime circle, the men he looked to for help to the end," Mr. Henderson observed.

The press club system ratifies the belief of journalists that they are part of the ruling class. Through the press clubs, they have access to the president or his cabinet members.
Reporting: American Style

KANG DUK-JANG was a young business reporter on the English-language Korea Daily. He had little experience and struggled with economic stories that had to be translated from Korean into English. He admired the way American reporters pursued stories but doubted he would ever have such an opportunity himself, since it is not the press tradition in his native land.

Day in and day out, he took the government handouts or culled the Korean-language newspapers for stories that could be translated. Then there was the day his telephone rang. He listened to the caller and slowly realized he was being given an important news tip from a good source. Traditionally, a reporter acknowledges the call and waits for the government to make an announcement. But Mr. Kang's instincts were to go for the story.

The tipster told him the Ministry of National Defense had decided to sign a multimillion-dollar contract with General Dynamics Corporation to modernize the Republic of Korea Air Force. The Ministry selected General Dynamics' F-16 jet fighter after previously saying it was going to acquire the F-18A from McDonnell-Douglas.

This was a big story for two reasons. First, South Koreans are always mindful of the military threat from the North. Modern aircraft means stronger defenses. Second, the Koreans want the technology to build their own jet fighters and General Dynamics's offer would move them closer to that goal.

Mr. Kang started to check out the story in the government bureaucracy. It was a slow process since such officials are not accustomed to tenacious questioning from a reporter. He called the American representatives of both General Dynamics and McDonnell-Douglas. They were more forthcoming and spoke on the record.

Everything his tipster had given him held up. He had an exclusive story, American style, and he submitted it to his editors. They went with it in the next day's edition. None of the Korean-language newspapers or other media picked it up. In fact, it was three days later, when the Ministry put out its own announcement confirming Mr. Kang's exclusive. It was only then that the other papers carried the story.

Access to the inner circles of government is a heady experience.

Even American journalists vie for access to the powerful in government, and some forget the traditional watchdog role of the press. David Broder, the distinguished political reporter for the Washington Post, noted this in a speech in December 1990 at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, where he was the George Chaplin Scholar-in-Residence.

"Certainly in Washington, D.C., in the time we have lived there, there has been a melding and a coalescing of the world of journalism and the world of politics that has been fairly dramatic and, to me, fairly disturbing," he observed. "Some of it is good . . . but there is also an increasing social intimacy between reporters and journalists in Washington and the people we write about and cover," Mr. Broder cautioned.

This kind of soul-searching does not take place in Korean press circles. It would be inconsistent with their standing in the hierarchy, the one that derives from the Chosôn dynasty. The closer they can get to the seat of power, the more likely they are to achieve wealth, fame, and a political career.

Nowhere is influence peddling more important than at the Blue House, the presidential mansion. Many of the press club members there have been invited to take prestigious positions in the government.
posts in the Ministry of Information. Fifty-five former reporters ran for the national assembly in 1987 and 26 won seats. Some 9 percent of the legislature was composed of former journalists.

The watchdog role as a surrogate of the people is well down the list of priorities. Thus another fundamental difference, perhaps the most

fundamental difference, emerges in the tradition of the Korean press compared with the tradition of the Western press. American journalists believe strongly in their role as watchdogs of government and those institutions and organizations that can wield powerful influence over the common man.

There are Korean writers who find themselves in opposition to the government and now are able to express it in print because of the 1987 basic press law. They take a position that has support from special factions in Korean society and is consistent with the Confucianist social constitution.

The cumulative effect of the press club system is to dull the knife of aggressive journalism, the kind that American readers take for granted in their newspapers.

The government has a captive club conveniently tranquilized by tradition. The club members value friendship above individual achievement. This virtually assures that government pronouncements have a smooth journey to the editor's desk. A press club member is not going to walk down the corridor to a private phone and start checking out the veracity or motives of a government press release. The sting of government disfavor and the humiliation from his friends because he broke the code would be simply too much to bear.

"Government censorship has been replaced by self-censorship, so the government statement goes into the newspaper, unchallenged, unquestioned, and unfettered..."

Meanwhile, the desk editor at the newspaper has an opportunity to see that the story is fully developed. Normally, this is an older, experienced journalist who survived the heavy-handed repression of the Chun Doo-hwan regime. If he is even more senior, he likely experienced press controls and censorship under Park Chung-hee and even back to the 1950s and Syngman Rhee.

Those were brutal times, not easily forgotten by the senior journalists who had military censors in the newsrooms, telephone threats from government henchmen, imprisonment, beatings, offices ransacked, and newspapers closed down. They developed a keen sense of survival and today have a tribal memory that anticipates the government's desires. Government censorship has been replaced by self-censorship, so the government statement goes into the newspaper, unchallenged, unquestioned, and unfettered just as though it were a royal decree of the Chosôn dynasty.

The press clubs also accommodate another
custom and it causes the most humiliation for the media. It is the institutionalized acceptance from newsmakers of *ch'onji*, which literally means small gifts. Korean journalists are aware of the world press criticism of this practice. Their explanations tend to be emotional, either in defending *ch'onji* or acknowledging that the time has come to do away with it.

The general ethical standard of the American press stipulates that the acceptance of gifts or money from newsmakers constitutes a conflict of interest. Depending upon the severity of the case, American journalists can face various penalties, including removal from a news beat, suspension without pay, a letter of reprimand, or being fired. If a violation of statutes is involved, the individual may face criminal charges.

Ethics codes evolved in the 1960s and 1970s in America when newspaper editors concluded that they had a credibility problem with the readers. In the first half of the century, many American reporters accepted the so-called white envelopes or “freebies” from news sources. Such practices are naturally not well documented and are best measured by the strong ethics codes that evolved.

However, there was never much debate that accepting gifts or money constituted a conflict of interest. The American media have not only banned the contents of the envelope, but have discarded the white envelope itself to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

That is not the case with the Korean press. There is a question of what constitutes a bribe and what is a gift. Foreign journalists based in Korea tend to scoff at this alleged cultural dilemma, taking the uncompromising view that acceptance of money or gifts from a newsmaker is a bribe.

The Korean journalists respond with a phrase often heard by foreigners: “You do not understand our traditions.” They tend to agree that soliciting money or favors is wrong, but receiving unsolicited gifts is another matter.

There is a historical case to be made for the practice of accepting gifts. It derives from the Confucian *mip'ung yangsok*, the practice of reciprocity and mutual help. It is a venerated custom from the time when Korea was predominantly a rural society where villagers and farmers would help each other.26

Writer Yang Sung-chul suggests the system is not uniquely Korean but “common among people leading agrarian and rural life-styles.” Indeed, the custom of farmers helping each other plant and harvest crops is well-known in the United States.

The conflict that the Korean journalists now have with *ch'onji* and other traditional practices is part of the overall society’s dilemma in transforming from an agrarian system to an urban system, in Mr. Yang’s view. “South Korea’s fast economic transformation and urbanization have created a series of problems such as urban overcrowding and squalor, traffic congestion, pollution, crime, labor-management disputes, regional and sectoral disparities, generational conflicts and student radicalism,” Mr. Yang contends. While Korea has become an urban nation, the people still have a traditional belief system or “habits of the heart,” a term Mr. Yang credits to French writer Alexis de Tocqueville.27

The very foundation of Confucianism is the family and unconditional filial piety. Inherent in this is the worship of ancestors, who Confucians believe never die since their blood lives on in their descendants. There is an undercurrent of neotraditionalism that fears that democracy with its progressive characteristics will wrest Koreans from their most fundamental belief.
Thus, the Confucian traditions of rural Korea have not traveled well from the 19th century to the 20th century. With industrialization and technological development, Korea has shifted from being an agrarian society to being an urban society in the course of the last 30 years.

Confucius is having a difficult time making the transition. It seems the Koreans are determined to take the philosopher out of the country, but they can’t take the country out of the philosopher. The reciprocity and mutual help of rural society have become the acid rain of the urban society, corroding almost all aspects of Korea’s modern lifestyle. It is especially noticeable in education and the mass media, both of which held exalted standing in the elite yangban society of the Choson dynasty.

Park Heung-soo, a sociologist and dean of planning and development at Yonsei University, a Christian institution, said Confucianism is dead in the context of the development of the nation. He notes the rapid growth of Christianity in Korea. But Yim Young-jae, dean of international affairs at Dankook University, believes Confucianism is still a powerful influence in Korea and will remain so.

Most aspects of this intellectual debate tend to be subordinated to the habits of the heart in the newsrooms. Thus in the minds of Korean journalists, the matter of whether ch’onji is a gift or a bribe is a subject for legitimate debate. An editor in Kwangju said the ethical issue of ch’onji is another example of “Western pollution of Korean tradition.” He argued with vigor that he could accept ch’onji and still write a fair story.

But the small gift is no longer small. There were three ch’onji scandals in 1991 involving hundreds of thousands of dollars in payoffs to reporters and editors in Seoul. The most notable was the Suso housing scandal. This story first came to public light in February of 1991 when nine people, including a presidential aide and five lawmakers, were indicted, and subsequently convicted, for accepting 1.4 million dollars in bribes from the Hanbo Housing Company.

Hanbo needed government approval to build a huge apartment complex in an area that had been designated as green space. The company stood to make enormous profits if it could develop the land, located in Suso in the southern environs of Seoul. Demand for housing in Seoul is unremitting and through a unique real estate system, developers do not have to build on speculation, a common practice in the United States.

In Korea, once the government approves a project, the developer collects up front the cost of the apartment, actually a condominium, from the prospective buyer. It means the buyer must come up with the money, usually several hundred thousand dollars, in advance. It can be two or three years before the buyer actually moves into the apartment.

Some mortgage financing is available, but traditionally in Korea, a married couple will turn to their family for the required money. In a sense, the family rather than the couple owns the apartment, and some family members may also move in. At the least, they are always welcome.

So the developer has the money in his pocket before the first earth-moving machine starts to level the land. The only risk to the developer is bringing in the project at its estimated cost.

The prosecutor-general’s office announced the indictments and followed this up a few days later by saying the Hanbo Housing Company had distributed large amounts of hush money to the press. The office indicated it would call in reporters and editors for questioning.
Kim Young-sam, executive chairman of the ruling Democratic Liberal Party, following a meeting February 6, 1991, with President Roh Tae-woo, said "there would be no haven allowed in the investigation of the scandal. Even journalists can be subject to investigation."  

This was more than two weeks before any published accounts of the press accepting payoffs from Hanbo.

The alleged payoffs to the press started in September 1990. The exact amount of money that reportedly went into reporters' and editors' pockets has not been determined.

The investigation of the press never happened, or if it did, the findings are in some prosecutor's file cabinet. The prosecutor-general's office said the law governing bribery does not apply to journalists receiving cash from news sources. That decision let the media off the hook, at least legally.  

Chung Tae-soo, chairman of Hanbo, reportedly told prosecutors that he personally met senior editors. "I did those in the press quite a lot of good. But I am disappointed at the way they handled my case," he was quoted as saying.

The alleged payoffs to the press started in September 1990. The account of the press involvement was reported in considerable depth, not in the major Seoul newspapers, but rather in the Ilyo Shinmun, a Sunday newspaper.  

Hankyoreh Shinmun, which professes to have a ban on accepting gifts or cash from newsmakers, carried the first article concerning the press bribes on February 23, 1991. It appeared on page 15. Another newspaper that sometimes shows an independent streak, the Segye Ilbo, owned by the Unification Church of the Rev. Moon Sun-myung, carried a short front-page article on February 24. However, the two major national morning papers, the Chosun Ilbo and the Hankook Ilbo carried small articles well inside their pages on February 24, 1991.

The exact amount of money that reportedly went into reporters' and editors' pockets has not been determined. One account estimated $55,600 was distributed among 60 members of the Seoul City Hall press club who represented 20 media organizations.

The Associated Press said $75,000 was distributed to the city hall reporters. However, talk persisted that some individual senior editors received up to $30,000 each for keeping the Suso story out of print.

A reporter who claimed personal knowledge, but spoke on the basis he would not be identified, explained how the money was distributed in the press club. The payment went to the club president, also a working journalist. He then decided how much should go to each member taking into account the seniority of the member and the importance and circulation of the publication.

The public knowledge brought embarrassment to the media. Newspapers published editorials urging self-examination and a change.
in the practice of accepting gifts. "Self-purification" was an oft-used term.\textsuperscript{33}

The Korean Newspaper Editors Association urged authorities to make public any information they had on payoffs to journalists. The association also was critical of the press clubs. The reporters' union, known as the Journalists Association of Korea, also called for measures to stop bribe-taking.\textsuperscript{34}

Based on the collective embarrassment and the calls for reform, the Suso housing scandal would become the defining issue in ending the \textit{ch'onji} custom in Korean journalism. Senior editors and junior reporters were saying as much in private conversations. Wiser words came from one of Korea's most respected journalists, a man whose courageous opposition to the repressions of the Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan authoritarian regimes has given him an honored status. "What counts here is the action. We have gone through this before and nothing changes. Nothing will change until the senior editors enforce a policy," admonished Park Kwon-sung.

Mr. Park had resigned in early 1991 as editor of the \textit{Sisa Journal}, a weekly news magazine. Educated in England and at the University of Missouri and Northwestern University schools of journalism, he had established a formal code of ethics for the magazine staff. \textit{Sisa} reporters and editors cannot accept gifts and must even pay for their own meals when interviewing newsmakers. They are given expense accounts, a common practice in American journalism. However, it is not a common practice in Korean journalism.

"You are naive to believe the Suso scandal will change matters," Mr. Park told his interviewer. He went on to say that if senior editors are sincere, they would break up the press clubs but that too would not happen.\textsuperscript{35} Mr. Park's assessment was correct. The media's public statements about the shame of the Suso housing scandal turned out to be an act of contrition, asking the people for forgiveness, not prayers seeking the path to reform. Reforms were not forthcoming.

To assess how much money goes into the pockets of Korean journalists in a year is impossible. Whereas Koreans have an insatiable fascination with statistics, measuring payoffs, whether they be bribes or gifts, is not a matter for public record. But there are several indicators of the magnitude of the payoffs and some rough extrapolations may be instructive.

A 1989 survey by the Korea Press Institute reported 93 percent of journalists regularly received money from news sources. A 1990 survey by the Journalists Association found that 75 percent of the 700 reporters responding admitted to receiving \textit{ch'onji}. Now \textit{ch'onji} can come in the form of money, expensive gifts, or even overseas junkets that include cruise ships and entertainment. The journalist association survey does not include the senior editors, who have greater responsibility for the content of the newspapers. Typically, their gifts or bribes are proportionately larger.

If the average amount of \textit{ch'onji} is $1,000 per reporter per month, that is $12,000 annually, a conservative estimate in the face of the payoff scandals that have become public. Taking that one step further by multiplying the annual $12,000 by the 525 reporters who admitted in the survey to accepting \textit{ch'onji}, the overall payoff is $6.3 million on a yearly basis. Admittedly, this is a shaky calculation, but there is some basis for this conclusion and, furthermore, that it is a conservative figure. Examples of the widespread practice of \textit{ch'onji} are:

- The Suso housing scandal payoffs to as many as 80 newsmen allegedly amounted

\textit{Confucianism Defies the Computer}
to $750,000 based on another estimate from the prosecutor-general’s investigation.

- A scandal in the Labor Ministry press club in which the club president solicited *ch’onji* from newsmakers. Estimated “contributions”: $85,000.

- Nineteen of 21 reporters covering the Health Ministry received $118,000 from their sources in one month.

- Reporters reassigned from a news beat to an inside newsroom position get a special inside allowance, *naekun sudang*, to offset the loss of the white envelope. This can range from 25 to 35 percent of their base pay.

- A gift of $140, which is 100,000 won, is quite common and given at traditional holidays such as Ch’usok (Korean thanksgiving) and lunar new year.

- Some newspapers, established in the frenzy of media growth since enactment of the press freedom law in 1987, are struggling financially and expect their reporters to derive their income from their news sources. These are not front-line newspapers.

- While press clubs are the traditional and most profitable repositories of *ch’onji*, the culture and entertainment beats also have their system. Many art galleries, for example, consider a gift to a reporter to get publicity in the paper another cost of doing business.

- A journalist who left a newspaper to take an attractive public relations position with a well-known hotel then learned the primary job was to distribute white envelopes to deserving reporters. The journalist immediately resigned.

- *Ch’onji* never dies, it just changes envelopes. One reporter told of how he customarily received payoffs and would spend some of it buying drinks for his fellow reporters. He would take the rest home to his wife who in turn would take $70 (50,000 won), place it inside the cover of a new book, and present it as a gift to the teacher of their son.36

The giving of gifts began in agrarian Confucian tradition. But it is now an urban Confucian tradition, and the difference between a gift and a payoff has become very fuzzy. The rules have changed, but old habits make this difficult for even the most thoughtful Koreans to accept. Even filial piety, the heart and soul of Confucianism, is under challenge by the rapid transition to an urban life-style. Young people show less and less reverence for their elders.

Confucianism prescribes that wealth should never be flaunted, but flaunted it is in expensive automobiles, jewelry, and trendy clothes, even to double-whopper hamburgers and large-size Cokes in the fast-food restaurants.

The grass-roots movement of the people, abetted by the government, has sought to curb this conspicuous consumption and flaunting of wealth and return to the Confucian ethics of hard work and humility. This movement finds a sympathetic forum in the media, but it does not seem to permeate the thin paper of a white envelope. The envelopes are not moral-degradable and continue to circulate in all strata of Korean society.

But “that everybody does it” does not immunize the media and education from public disfavor. Both find themselves under uncomfortable scrutiny from inside and outside the national borders. Perhaps it is because they have positioned themselves as the moral arbiters of Korean society, but in a way consistent with their *yangban* ruling class mindset. Thus the gifts and privileges they receive are worthy of their station in society, but the same is not necessarily true for the masses.

Lee Kyoo-hyun recalled his earlier days in...
Mid-career Journalists Survey

FIFTEEN mid-career Korean journalists participated in January 1992 in a one-week workshop at the East-West Center. They responded to a survey regarding the Korean press and its coverage of U.S.-Korea policy matters. It is not a statistically valid survey, but the responses are of interest.

Eleven respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed with a statement that despite press freedom, the Korean media still follow the wishes of the central government, particularly in matters dealing with foreign affairs. Four disagreed.

There was a split on the question of whether the Korean press presents a balanced view of trade negotiations between Korea and the United States. Eight respondents said no and seven said yes.

The respondents were divided when asked to select one of four choices as to why the Korean press has been so critical of American policies. Five said it is because of a strong feeling of nationalism. Four said it is because of internal Korean politics of traditionalists versus reformists. One said it is an anti-Americanism view of Korean journalism, and five said the premise is an incorrect opinion held by Americans.

In the fall of 1990, the Korean government took a position in the Uruguay Round of the GATT talks that opposed the American position. The Korean press published numerous articles critical of the U.S. position on lowering tariffs and subsidies. The respondents were asked to select one of four choices why the press supported the government's GATT position. Again there was a division of opinion. Five said the newspapers made independent judgments to support the government. Five more said it was because of a feeling of nationalism, and three said the government told the press what to do. Two said it was because of anti-Americanism.

Shortly thereafter, Seoul switched its position and the deputy prime minister for economic planning resigned. The press also flip-flopped when the government changed its policy. The respondents were asked why this occurred. Eight of the respondents said the press made independent decisions, four said the government submitted to U.S. pressure, and three said the premise of the questions is a misperception of the facts.

In summary, the journalists feel rather strongly that the media follow the wishes of the government. Also, they believe nationalism, rather than anti-Americanism, is the more significant reason for press criticism of American government policies.

newspapering and the character of ch'onji as a gift. It is indicative of how it has changed in modern-day journalism. "My newspaper had a policy that no one could solicit money. That was a bribe. But gifts of money, and they were all small gifts in those days, were acceptable and most came at the time of holidays," he said. "Reporters were paid very little, so they had little to begin with, but instead of taking the gift money home, they would take all their friends out for a night of drinking until all the money was gone. Then they would spend their salary as well."

It seemed most reporters were always broke, Mr. Lee recalled, requiring them to frequently visit the pay clerk to get an advance so they would have some money to take home. The newspapers were compassionate in advancing money, he said.

Ch'onji has closely followed the cost-of-living index, or perhaps, more accurately, the quality-of-life index in Korea. The 10 and 20 dollars of Mr. Lee's earlier days have added a couple of zeros today and they come more frequently. A certain amount may go for buy-
ing drinks for press club associates, but more and more the money is used to pay for automobiles, televisions, tuition, and homes.

The theory that if reporters were better-paid they would not accept money is not valid in this case. A five-year reporter on a Seoul newspaper can earn $40,000 in pay and bonuses in addition to all the white envelopes his pockets will hold. This figures quite well in a nation where the 1991 per capita income was slightly more than $6,000.

With that kind of money in sight, journalism has become one of the prestige careers in Korea's hierarchical society. When a major newspaper in Seoul announces a job opening, up to 1,000 candidates from all backgrounds sign up for the comprehensive hiring examination.

There is one conspicuous deficiency in all this. Most newspapers do not give expense accounts to reporters, a common practice in the United States. Therefore, reporters must pay for business lunches, cab fares, and other expenses out of their own pockets. The lack of expense accounts is sometimes offered as justification for accepting ch'onji. This is especially significant in Korea, where social rituals normally precede any business discussions.

In late 1991, following the revelations of the Ministry of Health scandal, the Chosun Ilbo issued guidelines banning ch'onji. The newspaper also issued credit cards to all supervising editors for the purpose of covering normal expenses for newsgathering. Furthermore, if reporters turn in receipts, they will be reimbursed for approved out-of-pocket costs such as cab fares.

Despite the public apologia, the end of the ch'onji tradition will not come easily, if at all. However, there is a growing sentiment that something must be done. How to accomplish that is another matter. Some newspaper managements have taken steps to end the system only to be confronted by objections from the same reporters who previously had criticized ch'onji.

Perhaps still bearing the imprint of the authoritarian governments of the recent past, some journalists call for the government to step in and ban the practice. It is a dilemma in the best sense of the word where more and more journalists are feeling uncomfortable. Many have had an educational experience in an American university journalism school. In most programs they get a heavy dose of ethics, much of it about conflicts of interest. Accepting money for news stories, or not printing news stories, as was the case in the Suso scandal, is clearly defined as a conflict of interest in any American newsroom.

On the other hand, there are journalists, particularly on newspapers in the provinces, who are not sensitized to the conflict-of-interest aspect. Writing a favorable story about a newsmaker and getting a gift of gratitude in return is perfectly normal. "We did not realize there was a problem until foreign journalists told us about it," explained one reporter who did not want to be identified.

Payoffs, bribes, hush money, gifts, or whatever they are called, are no stranger to American journalism. Over the years, white envelopes found their way into many a pocket. Written codes of ethics were uncommon in American newsrooms until the 1980s. However, even if American newspapers did not have written codes until recently, there has been an understood moral code of accuracy, fairness, and objectivity. It is intrinsic in journalistic teaching. Texts assume these inherent characteristics of American journalism and reiterate them over and over with idealistic fervor.

Indeed, many a beginning reporter becomes
confused and disoriented when he or she first learns that these moral imperatives that were so clear and concise in an academic environment become fuzzy and sometimes honored in the breach in the "real world."

Korean journalists, like Korean industrialists, scientists, politicians, and culturists, want international prestige and approval. This desire puts their traditional practices in conflict with Western journalistic ethics, particularly the American. In some respects, they have placed themselves upon this moral crucible by this world-class ambition.

Anti-Americanism, Nationalism, Or What?

Today, the Korean press has all the trappings of modern journalism: high-speed presses, excellent quality color, satellite printing plants, increasing numbers of newspapers and readers, business papers, sports papers, and most important of all, press freedom.

Yet, the mindset that translates thoughts into printed words remains primarily fixed in the ideals of the Chosŏn dynasty. There are indications of change, not yet in the fundamentals, but around the edges.

Despite the general acceptance of official press statements, there is criticism of government and its major ally, the United States, in the Korean press. Some of this originates with middle-level officials who were educated in the protest environment of the 1980s. They quietly pass on their views to their former classmates in the media.

Opposition party leaders freely speak out against government policies and this is reported. There are factions within the ruling Democratic Liberal Party who occasionally air their differences in the press. All of this is in addition to the senior writers and editorialists who fulfill their intellectual yangban duties of giving critical advice as well as praise to the president.

Mr. Roh has been called the mul (water) president for not being decisive. He has even been called a liar, and he in return grumbles about the sensationalism of the media. However, Mr. Roh has shown far more tolerance of press criticism than any of his predecessors.

Under the authoritarian regimes, the media dared not criticize the United States or its military forces unless the government wanted them to do so for some political purpose. After October 29, 1987, that changed. One newspaper produced a series, generally but not totally favorable, on the U.S. forces in Korea. Also, the newspapers joined a popular campaign urging the U.S. forces to relocate their headquarters from their prime Seoul location.

They editorially demanded a stronger hand for Korea in the status-of-forces agreement with the United States, a pact that gives Korean authorities certain but not complete legal jurisdiction over American forces. Also, they frequently have referred derisively to the so-called big brother, little brother relationship between the two nations.

The critical articles have the same characteristic as the government statements; they are all one-dimensional, and attributable quotations and statements are rare. The telephones of American military and diplomatic officials or of foreign businessmen seldom ring with queries from Korean journalists. Efforts to develop an everyday working rapport with reporters has failed, but it is not only foreigners who have this experience. There is no tradition of presenting a well-balanced story regardless of whose ox is being gored.
For most of the American presence in Korea since 1945, this journalistic practice did not matter. The Seoul government controlled the media, and only on rare occasions would it allow the press to criticize an American policy. When it did, the American embassy staff knew where to go to put out the fire and it was not to the newsrooms but rather to the government. The press was a pawn and the American diplomats were frequently arrogant and sometimes heavy-handed in dealing with it.

One editor agreed to discuss such an incident that occurred in the mid-1970s under the promise of anonymity. He received a Saturday morning telephone call from a high-ranking U.S. embassy official who demanded he come to the embassy that afternoon to explain a story that displeased the Americans. Contritely, the editor went to the embassy, an extraordinary gesture in its own right, where he submitted to a severe lecture and the unsubtle reminder of American influence in the government, a clear threat of sanctions against the newspaper if it did not behave.

It is difficult to imagine the editor of the Washington Post responding to a summons from the Korean embassy or any embassy in Washington, D.C.

Certain types of stories could not be contained. For example, incidents in which American servicemen allegedly committed crimes against Koreans resulted in sensationalized stories in the Korean press. The information for the stories would come from national police reports.

In the mid-1950s, one of the more spectacular stories was that of the “Boy in the Box.” U.S. soldiers of a forward unit caught what was known in those days as a “slicky boy,” a petty thief who would take clothing, small amounts of money, or anything to sustain a livelihood in a war-impoverished nation. The American soldiers, at the direction of an officer, shaved the boy’s head, stripped him of his clothing, painted him yellow, sealed him in a wooden box, and flew him by helicopter to an American army logistics base known as ASCOM City. They dumped him. Later he was found by other American soldiers, relatively unharmed. He was turned over to Korean authorities.

The story would offend anyone’s sensibilities, but it also served the agenda of the Korean government, which wanted a status-of-forces agreement that would give it legal jurisdiction over American servicemen when they were in civilian areas outside their bases. The United States was not ready to turn over its servicemen to a system that it believed was corrupt and archaic. Eventually, both nations signed a status-of-forces agreement, and as recently as 1991 the Koreans got revisions they had wanted for years. It was a matter of national pride.

But the most lingering effect of anti-Americanism dates to the Kwangju uprising in 1980. It revived regional differences in Korea and provided radical student movements with a convenient whipping boy in their quest to destabilize the Seoul government. Radical students painted huge anti-American murals on university campuses, many of which still remain. Their dogma claimed America was to blame for all the country’s ills, including responsibility for starting the Korean War in 1950.39

Because of President Chun’s unremitting control at that time, the press was little able, even if it was so inclined, to assess the impact of anti-Americanism on the relationship between the two nations.

During the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, American military bases were on extra alert against radical student attacks. Several discourteous and disgraceful nonathletic activities by American
Olympic participants were played up prominently in the newspapers. The Korean public was offended by NBC television coverage for dwelling on some old, albeit, embarrassing customs.

Meanwhile, the Korea press was extolling the presence of the Soviet Union team and various cultural groups that performed in Seoul. Soviet literature was available in bookstores for the first time in decades. Young people cheered the Soviets and booed the Americans in the games. American culture and capitalism were under assault. The press followed along, neglecting or forgetting the role of American capital and technology in the economic miracle that was taking place in Korea. Most of Korea's brilliant technocrats were trained in the United States in educational programs financed by aid funds. At first, many did not want to return, but now they are the architects of Korea's extraordinary economic development.

Korea's young journalists, many of whom were themselves radical students in the most virulent days of the 1980s, either were never taught or have forgotten such details of the American involvement in Korea. Occasionally, a senior writer will take a long view of the U.S. role in Korea, but at the risk of using the current jargon—it is not politically correct.

Visiting American scholars find themselves unwelcome on university campuses and often have speeches or seminars canceled. USIS cultural centers around the country and the American embassy in Seoul resemble fortresses. Korean guards stand outside, supposedly for protection, but their presence is intimidating. The libraries in the centers are lightly used. The American ambassador is discouraged from visiting universities to meet with students because the educators fear disruption. Intellectuals talk of American decadence, and so-called public interest groups have been trying for years to limit access for Korean viewers to the American Forces Korea Network, a television and radio facility for American forces. Foreign journalists find accreditation and work permits take months for approval.

In 1987, bilateral trade negotiations moved to the center stage of American-Korean relationships. After more than 30 years of U.S. grants, technology transfer, expertise, and favored duty-free status under the General System of Preferences program, Korea had become an economic powerhouse. In 1987, it had a $10 billion trade surplus with its economic benefactor.

The United States had accepted Korea's protectionist trade policies up to that point but then wanted the Seoul government to open its markets to American goods and services. The Korean government took the position that it was still a developing nation and needed more time for its economy to mature. The press coverage has almost unwaveringly followed the government line. What should be well-balanced news accounts almost seem like episodes in a continuing morality play—a rapacious American businessman trying to pluck the heart out of a 5,000-year-old culture.

Day after day, news stories contain snide buzz words deriding the pressure tactics of the U.S. government and entrepreneurs. The following is typical. On May 29, 1991, Seoul newspapers carried a story of almost identical wording that was provided through the Yonhap News Agency. The lead of the story said: "The American oil firm Caltex, even as the public remains suspicious about the U.S. role in halting the direct barter of rice for coal between South and North Korea, has raised objections to its South Korean partner selling diesel to the North." The account went on to say Caltex protested

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that the fuel is a strategic item banned by the rules of the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls.42

One newspaper, the English-language Korea Daily, reported that Honam Oil Refinery, the local partner of Caltex, denied that Caltex objected. "Caltex merely expressed its regret that it had not been informed in advance of such a deal," a Honam spokesman said. The merits of the account notwithstanding, what is noteworthy is the readiness of Korean journalists to jump on anything that is anti-American without taking the trouble to get both sides of the story.

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The barter of rice for coal mentioned in the previous story followed a similar path. The press reported the U.S. government objected to the barter, thus halting the initial shipment of 5,000 of a scheduled 100,000 tons of rice to North Korea for cement, coal, and other minerals. The story was attributed to an unnamed Korean agricultural source. When the Dong-A Ilbo published a major piece on May 5, 1991, saying the United States was blocking the barter deal, once again the Americans were the guys in the black hats.

Typically, the press made a morality play out of it, stirring emotions by claiming it was a humanitarian matter of providing needed rice to the barren kitchens of North Korea, and further pointing out it was an internal matter of Korean to Korean despite the fact the country had been divided since 1945.

Actually, it was a complicated issue and needed careful explanation of the kind that is not normally seen in the Korean press. First, the government had failed to notify the United Nations, as required, of the proposed barter. Second, since Korea has closed its own market to rice imports, it is supposed to notify through the United Nations other rice-exporting nations that might want to bid on the contract.

This writer called Jack Sears, the U.S. embassy press attaché, and asked if indeed the United States was blocking the barter deal. Mr. Sears responded that the U.S. government was not involved but that the U.S. rice growers' association had objected to the barter. Again, there was no query from the local press, he said.

Subsequently, an announcement from the Korean government said American rice growers had objected and it was on the basis of a complex international agreement that allows all nations to have a bid at new rice markets. Eventually, the barter deal between the two Koreas was effected. Instructive here is how the press waits for the government to make a statement rather than aggressively seeking complete information for a story.
Other typical leads on stories:

"Again bowing to pressure from the United States, the Korean government plans to allow foreign shipping companies to start trucking services in the country . . ." (Korea Herald, June 13, 1991).

"The United States has been ruthless in pushing its demands in trade, intellectual property rights and other negotiations with Korea and States is portrayed as the heavy and much of it is with the blessing of some Korean government agency.

There is a way for the other side of the story to get told. Fortunately, or maybe it is unfortunately, these stories do not get frequent-flyer credits because they have to travel 15,000 miles or more, all electronically, of course. For example, the American Chamber of Commerce in Seoul, which many Koreans believe

"The effect of this journalistic practice of not going to other sources for a balanced story is substantial."

in most cases, it has got what it wants" (Korea Times, June 6, 1991).

The second lead concerned an upcoming meeting on a new U.S.-Korean aviation accord. It was the first paragraph of a two-part series. The series did not contain a single quotation or a single name, but the details of the Korean position made it clear the story came from the government.

On June 13, 1991, both sides agreed to a new aviation pact that broadly opened the U.S. market to Korean air carriers. In fact, the agreement was generally lauded in the press. The advance stories outlining the Korean demands made it appear the Korean government had played hardball with Uncle Sam and prevailed. Most likely, the American officials did not mind.

The effect of this journalistic practice of not going to other sources for a balanced story is substantial. In article after article, the United

is an arm of the U.S. government, takes its case to Washington, D.C. A Chamber statement is released in Washington to the wire services. The story is then transmitted to Seoul and is carried in the Seoul newspapers pretty much intact.

However, the Korean government is quick to react with its own story that is dutifully turned in by the press club reporter just as he gets it from the official spokesman. The government story does not challenge the Chamber statement, instead it seems to suggest that a new program was already in the works to take the sting out of the American Chamber's complaints.

The American Chamber, commonly called AmCham, circulated a report on Capitol Hill in Washington on November 11, 1990, that the Korean government restricts market access through numerous barriers. The story was widely played in the Korean press, but so was a Seoul government announcement that it
had decided to take measures to minimize trade friction with the United States. It is not the nature of the Korean press to independently follow up on such accounts to see if the American Chamber claim has any merit or if the Korean government does what it said it will do. Thus no one need be surprised when the Chamber, five months later, makes the same charges, in addition to a few new ones, in a biannual report issued in Washington and Seoul. About 10 days prior to the release of the Chamber report, the Korean government issued policy statements on measures to ease trade frictions. The Ministry of Trade and Industry said it was going to set up a complaint window system to handle trade misunderstandings. Foreign Minister Lee Sang-ock called for the introduction of an early-warning system between the two countries to prevent unnecessary friction and misunderstanding.

This sort of routine goes on and on. One of the U.S. government's many grievances deals with copyrights and patent infringements. In the spring of 1991, just before a top-ranking U.S. trade delegation was scheduled to arrive in Seoul for discussions on such infringements and other major topics, a story was disseminated by the national police regarding a crackdown on merchants selling domestically manufactured goods that violated U.S. copyrights or patents. The next day, a follow-up story told of the success of the crackdown. Given the Korean penchant for statistics, the readers learned item by item what was confiscated, right down to the number of Reebok sport shoes that seem to be a favorite of the copiers. Generally, the police raids take place in high visibility markets frequented by foreigners.

What the readers never see is the next story, which, if it were written, would point out that after the trade delegation left, all the illegal goods were back on the shelves again and ready to be purchased at bargain prices.

One reporter, who asked not to be identified, recounted an experience in writing an economic story that, based on the facts, was favorable to America and unfavorable to Korea. The reporter anticipated getting criticism from the supervising editor and from peers, which happened. Another reporter, who also asked not to be named, recalled getting peer pressure not to write about an American film distribution company that was trying to expand its market in Korea. Both stories were published.

Again it is necessary to understand the Korean-American relationship in a Confucian context. In the Confucian doctrine of the Five Relationships, there must be between elder and younger a proper order. In this case, the elder is the United States, which has the obligation to wisely provide for Korea, the younger, which in return must exhibit respect and deference. Thus, the factual case aside, there still remains in the minds of the Korean people the perception that their big brother should continue to help them. This leads to an impression that Koreans are submissive to their superiors or greater powers. History supports this impression, but Korean scholars, and most certainly the radical student movement, have another view.

In a paper titled “Korean Perceptions of the United States,” Auh Taik-sup, a journalism professor at Korea University, asserts that many Koreans are shunning the traditional role of submissiveness. The result is a nation that functions efficiently but not always smoothly. A great deal of tension exists among political, economic and social sectors. “In this atmosphere of tension and conflict between the affluent and the poor, the politically privi-
leged and the underprivileged, Korea is now experiencing a new wave of nationalism," Prof. Auh wrote, "which often manifests itself in the form of anti-Americanism.

Prof. Auh suggests that it may be more accurately called "anti-pro-Americanism," indicating a more nearly equal relationship of friend to friend.

Whether coincidental or intended, the current American policy toward South Korea also expresses this desire. Nowhere is this clearer than in the matter of trade. And the Korean media seem caught up in the vortex of this changing relationship. Rather than taking an independent course of informing readers of all sides of the issue, they fall back on "habits of the heart" and await the official statements.

Prof. Auh notes that the Korean media, which had been stoutly pro-United States, have increasingly taken an anti-American position. Seldom do the media support the U.S. position on politics, trade, and culture, he said.

It is helpful to remember the contradictory character of Korea, readily accepted by Koreans, but a constant vexation to Westerners. To the Koreans, the tune on the compact disc is an old folk song, but the Americans are hearing rock and roll.

Prof. Auh suggests that anti-Americanism, or anti-pro-Americanism, may really be a manifestation of nationalism that is surfacing because of a struggle between the poor and the affluent. However, this theory faces a challenge from the emergence of the middle class in Korea. As a people, Koreans have never in history enjoyed such prosperity as now. Indeed, there is increasing concern that the people have started the celebration too soon.

Two other opinions are worth considering in trying to define the anti-American movement in Korea. One is the aforementioned view of Shim Jae-hoon, Seoul bureau chief of the Far Eastern Economic Review and highly respected for the way he defied previous authoritarian regimes. That is that political and social development has not matured at the same pace as military and economic development.

A similar view was espoused 25 years earlier by Gregory Henderson in his book on Korea. In this case, the culprit was the 36 years of Japanese colonization. "By forbidding overt political activity, Japanese colonialism tended to freeze ancient Korean patterns and political instincts in the form they had taken by the end of the Yi Dynasty. When liberation came (in 1945), the old instincts of uncurbed, atomized access to central power, part Yi, part derived from modern urbanization, were ready to assert themselves," he wrote.

Putting Mr. Henderson's hypothesis together with Mr. Shim's more recent views, the result is a nation that must reach back to the bedrock of the 19th-century Yi dynasty to set the footings and a cornerstone of democracy that bears the date 1987. Since the press is such an integral part of this societal hierarchy, it too is wrestling with its past and may not fully understand why.

All of these views point to something more complex than anti-Americanism or nationalism taking place in Korea. What is occurring is a spectacular power struggle of the kind that Koreans know best. It is the neotraditionalists, locked in the mindset of the Choson dynasty, challenging the progressives, weaned on modern technology and economic theories of Japan and the United States, the principal influences of the 20th century. The guide for this struggle is the code of Confucianism, a social constitution that transcends all factions as the habits of the heart.
Because the press takes its cues from the government, whether consciously or subconsciously, it does not present a source of independent thought for the public on this internal struggle. Thus, the royal decrees continue. If the government says the Russian bear is a fine fellow, the press says he is a fine fellow. If the government says trade with China is a good thing, the press says trade with China is a good thing. If the government says the Korean labor unions must ease their wage demands, the press says the labor unions must ease their wage demands.

An excellent example of this is the most emotional issue in all of Korea: the reunification of the North and South. In a society based on a family structure, nothing can be more painful than the separation endured by Korean families for 47 years. Aging must be taking its toll in deaths, but the absolute cutoff of communication over the years can only leave families wondering about the fate of relatives in the North.

There was an understandable surge in hope when East Germany united with West Germany in what coldly has been called the world's greatest leveraged buyout. The Seoul government sent a fact-finding team to Germany to see what lessons could be learned. When the Korean government analyzed the cost of a similar buyout of North Korea, it realized it could not afford it. Such a takeover would bankrupt the South's economy, in the view of the experts. The government knew it had a tiger by the tail in this highly emotional issue. The press, up to that point reflecting the enthusiasm of the people in the hope for reunification, abruptly shifted to the pragmatic view of the government that Seoul could not afford a German-style reunification.

Only when the government adopts a policy counter to the Confucian social constitution will the press digress, again as a habit of the heart. Rice is part of that culture. Rice is more than a field of grain ripening under a hot August sun; it is the embodiment of all that is Korea. Thus if a government official speaks out that Korea must open its rice market to imports of cheaper rice, the press reacts emotionally and stridently and the official finds a need “to clarify” his views.

The press tends not to write about rice and other agricultural products from the consumer's point of view. The stories, which emanate from the government or quasi-official special interest groups, always dwell on the negative impacts on farmers. Generally, the people support this approach. “Buy Korean” is no less patriotic than “Buy American.” But American readers can get a variety of viewpoints in their newspapers. Korean readers get only one.
A Few Wild Cards

It is an overstatement to totally ascribe the predictability of the Korean press to Confucianism and the influences of foreign intervention and authoritarian regimes. Those are the power cards in the deck, but there are a few wild cards still to be played.

One is the influence of Christianity, which is expanding rapidly and now counts 20 percent of South Koreans among its adherents. Korea is unusual among its Asian partners in the way the people are attracted to Christian religions. Because Christianity professes that all are equal in the eyes of God, it promotes egalitarianism, which is contrary to the hierarchical society of Confucianism. How this will affect the future character of Korea is a matter of speculation. There is the suggestion it can inspire individualism, a characteristic that would have a profound effect on the conformist practices of the press.

Second, Korea went through a baby boom after the Korean War of 1950-53 just like America after World War II. The average age of the Korean population is 29.50 Just like America in the 1960s, the baby boomers are rebellious, have been indulged by their parents, and have known only security, a good quality of living, and affluence. To the chagrin of their parents, they have adopted Western pop culture and have become Korean young urban professionals or Kyuppies.

Those baby boomers who turned to careers in journalism are the young turks, always challenging and intimidating management. They got the full charge of radicalism in the 1980s and enthusiastically forged a strong union movement that has achieved higher wages and some remarkable work rules. The staff of one newspaper, the Hankyoreh Shinmun, elects its editor.51 At several other newspapers the union has a veto power over top management appointments. A business newspaper folded in 1989 rather than accede to the union demands to control editorial appointments.52

The young journalists capitalize on every opportunity to embarrass the management and senior writers. An incident in the spring of 1991 vividly illustrates this point. Bruce Cheesman, a British journalist, was covering anti-government demonstrations on May 22, 1991, when he witnessed a woman set herself afire. The journalist pushed through the crowd and vainly tried to douse the flames. The young woman died.

He wrote a first-person story for British papers and observed that no Koreans had attempted to save the victim from herself. The Korean press picked up the story, and senior writers were moved to comment that the incident symbolizes the moral decay of Korean society. However, a Korean television crew was at the same scene, and its videotape revealed that several Koreans in the crowd attempted to save the burning youth. This brought an outcry from the young journalists that veteran writers are predisposed to accept anything a foreigner writes without question.

Embarrassed by the incident, the senior writers elected not to point out the hidden agenda of the young reporters. That was their support of the radical student movement that included marching in demonstrations and the union office preparing and distributing anti-government posters.

One conclusion is obvious. Young or old, there is no tradition in the Korean press for impartiality. It means Americans and American policies regarding Korea are going to be caught in the cross fire of this ideological battle. U.S. diplomats in Seoul are aware of this struggle, but they are in a dilemma regarding effective measures to deal with it.
A third wild card is the role of television news, both domestic and international. Though Korea's television networks are closely regulated by the government, the news staffs have essentially the same freedom as the newspapers. More than 90 percent of Korean homes have television sets. But the nature of television requires images for the cameras to focus on. This means showing real people with lips that move. Though far more reserved in their demeanor, television newscasters have adopted many of the styles of American television.

Government officials are seen and identified on television. Frequently, the cameras go to the streets to interview ordinary men and women on major issues. Political talk shows enjoy considerable popularity. It is a contrast to the newspapers, where the reporters still write with pens, do not identify the government officials, and continue to cite the opinions of anonymous observers just like Dr. Sŏ's Tongnip Shinmun of 1896.

The influence of international television is more difficult to assess. The transmission by satellite of coverage of the Gulf War drew thousands of Koreans to their television sets. Munwha Broadcasting Company carried frequent reports of Cable News Network along with simultaneous interpretation.

The Korean press had not been enthusiastic about the government sending noncombatant medical teams and making a financial contribution to the war. While awed by the military efficiency of the American forces as seen on CNN, the impact of global television also suggests more than a casual relationship to the press openly pondering an aggressive global policy of Pax Americana.

For a nation accustomed to strong central control, the ability for each household to have direct access to global television news is bound to have an impact on social structure. It is just too early to say what that impact will be in Korea.

The Last Word

Donald P. Gregg, American ambassador in Korea, says the press is like a jack-in-the-box that has just been released and is springing about in all directions.

Song Jung-Jea, president of the Pusan Ilbo, the largest newspaper outside of Seoul, says, "We have achieved press freedom, but we have not achieved press responsibility."

Kim Sang-hoon, chief editorial writer of the Pusan Ilbo, who says he is the dean of editorial writers in Korea, sees a lack of balance from the "extreme right" before 1987 to the "left extreme" after 1987. Perhaps that is a relative view since most Americans in Korea perceive Korean journalists to be far more conservative than their American counterparts.

Han Jong-woo, for many years a correspondent in Japan, later president of the Korea Herald, sees a continuing battle between management and militant unions controlled by radicals and leftists. Mr. Han is now president of the Sungkok Journalism Foundation.

Park Kwon-sung, a longtime prominent figure as both a writer and editor, predicts little change in the press in the next decade. "There will be a little more competition for the advertising dollar, but I am more concerned about how the chaebol [multinational conglomerates] are buying newspapers."

After four years of press freedom, the media have gained extraordinary influence in government and with the public. Within the ranks, the issues of responsibility, ethics, bal-
anced reporting, and development of a modern newsroom culture are all experiencing Gregg’s jack-in-the-box effect.

As a result, these issues are having a significant impact on Korean-American relationships.

In summation, the fundamentals of the 19th-century Choson dynasty still prevail today in the Korean press, modified by the influences of the Japanese, the Americans, and the authoritarian regimes of Syngman Rhee, Park Chung-hee, and Chun Doo-hwan.

These fundamentals are conformity in a hierarchical society as decreed by Confucius; education by rote, a system that does not seem to stimulate individual inquiry and curiosity, the vital tools of a journalist; and finally, the continuing struggle of neotraditionalist and progressive factions within Korea that have never learned how to compromise since the mythical Tan'gun founded the Korean peoples 5,000 years ago.

Notes

1. Lee Kyoo-hyun is one of Korea’s most respected journalists. He has also served in government as an ambassador and as minister of information. His newspaper career includes being a foreign correspondent and editor or chairman of various Korean newspapers. He frequently represents the Korean press at international forums.

2. The press reform law actually consists of amendments to the constitution. Article 21 provides four basic guarantees. (1) All citizens shall enjoy freedom of speech and the press and freedom of assembly and association. (2) Licensing or censorship of speech and the press and licensing of assembly and association shall not be recognized. (3) The standards of news service and broadcast facilities and matters necessary to ensure the functions of newspapers shall be determined by law. (4) Neither speech nor the press shall violate the honor or rights of other persons nor undermine public morals of social ethics. Should speech or the press violate the honor or rights of other persons, claims may be made for the damage resulting therefrom.

3. Scholars disagree on the beginning of Korea’s recorded history. Some argue it is nearly 5,000 years, while others insist it is actually around 2,000 years. Naturally this report on the Korean press does not wish to get into that debate.

4. This view was advanced during a discussion, February 28, 1991, with Korean journalists at the residence of John Fredenberg, U.S. information director in Seoul.


6. Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism (Macmillan, 1964), p. 722. President Calvin Coolidge never permitted quotes, direct or indirect, to be attributed to him. Herbert Hoover established the presidential ground rules that, with some modifications, are still followed today.

7. Such practices are not unknown in U.S. journalism. News magazines frequently offer a “kicker,” or closing statement that is purely the opinion of the magazine or the writer. Game stories in sports pages are replete with observations by the writers suggesting how the coaches might have better prepared their teams. It is a matter of degree. American newspapers include many quotes and attributions by name. Quotes and attributions in Korean newspapers are not common in government news reporting.

8. Korean Overseas Information Service, A Handbook of Korea, 8th ed., December, 1990, p. 497. Some journalism historians have selected earlier publications to denote the start of modern newspapers in Korea. However, these earlier publications were really royal court newsletters published on a monthly or occasional basis. The Tongnip Shinmun had a fair degree of independence, and its founding day is a commemorative holiday in Korea.

10. To contrast with this period of press repression in Korea, William Randolph Hearst, E. W. Scripps, and Frank A. Munsey were building newspaper dynasties in the United States. It was the beginning of newspaper chains that gave considerable power and influence to American press barons.

11. There is a variance in accounts of this period. Other historians indicated at least 68 dailies were established. In either case, it is a much faster growth rate than since October 29, 1987, the inception of modern press freedom. There is a widely held view that the current rate of newspapers start-ups is the greatest in history. It appears that view is in error.

12. Kim Dae-jong is an influential writer in Korea. He granted the writer a series of extensive interviews in his office at the Chosun Ilbo in June, 1991. His anecdotes and recollections filled in many of the details of the difficult days of authoritarian repression.

13. The Seoul Shinmun is still the official government newspaper. In the mid-1960s, the Korea Republic became a quasi-official government publication, and later majority control shifted to private interests. There is an apocryphal story regarding the name change of the Korea Republic to the Korea Herald. According to the story, the president of the Korea Republic made a visit to the United States, where he had the occasion to be introduced to some American businessmen. They mistook him to be the president of the Republic of Korea, and it caused considerable embarrassment to all. Upon returning to Seoul, the president directed the name of the newspaper be changed so there would be no confusion in the future.


15. Ibid., p. 16.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid. p. 17. By 1964, only 26 daily newspapers were publishing. Of these, the Dong-A Ilbo, Chosun Ilbo, Kyunghyang Shinmun, and Maeil Shinmun continued to oppose President Park's press controls.


19. Ibid. According to U.S. government accounts, Gen. Chun implied acquiescence on the part of the Americans to all of his actions from the takeover of the government to declaring martial law. U.S. officials made personal visits to the offices of the newspaper editors and publishers to counter Gen. Chun's claims. None dared to print the American version, even though it was available through the Associated Press.

20. Shim Jae-hoon interview, Foreign Correspondents Club of Seoul, May 15, 1991. Mr. Shim is reluctant to talk about his tribulations with the authoritarian regimes. However, he did say that his subsequent association with The New York Times and later the Far Eastern Economic Review, provided him with some degree of immunity from government harassment.

21. There are exceptions now. Foremost is the presidential press corps which covers the Blue House. The Ministry of Finance also has an open policy.


27. De Tocqueville, while writing about America and Americans, offered another theory that might give Koreans pause in their evolution as a democratic state. He said: "Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his
ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart...."

28. There seems to be a general agreement that Christianity is the fastest-growing religion in Korea though Buddhism is clearly dominant. Accurate figures are difficult to come by, but the most conservative estimates suggest 20 percent of the population is Christian. Estimates of up to 30 percent have been given public currency. It should be remembered that Confucianism is not a religion but rather a philosophy. Therefore, Christians, Buddhists, and others can readily subscribe to this centuries-old social constitution.


30. It also gave rise to speculation that an understanding had been reached between the press and the ruling party. When Kim Young-sam came out of the February 6, 1991, meeting with the president and said even journalists can be subject to investigation, it was taken as a not-so-subtle threat that the press should not pursue allegations of presidential involvement in the scandal. Since a presidential aide had been indicted, there was speculation on the extent of the Hanbo influence-peddling. Questions were raised editorially about whether President Roh Tae-woo had any knowledge of the deal, but nothing ever came of it.


33. "Probes of Journalists" (editorial), Korea Times, March 1, 1991, contains this telling statement: "The disclosure of the journalists' involvement in the multi-million dollar housing scandal is no surprise, as we have witnessed similar cases more often than not. Nonetheless, it is discouraging and deplorable to learn that the initial allegations implicating the journalists in the Hanbo scandal appear to be true."


36. Education has had its difficulties with ch'onji and the issues are similar. A "gift" to teachers to take special care of a son or daughter is a widespread practice. Somehow, the giving of the gift has taken on a ritual. The parents buy a new book and place the envelope of money inside the cover and present it to the teacher with felicitations.

37. A 1983 survey by Ralph S. Izard of Ohio State University's College of Journalism, revealed nearly 75 percent of the news media responding said they had stated policies. This compares with only 9 percent in a similar 1974 survey. Also, in 1974, only 30 percent of American newspapers with membership in the Associated Press had policies concerning the acceptance of gifts. In 1983, some 88 percent of AP member papers had policies.


39. During the buildup to the Gulf War in early 1991, the radical students were denouncing the American policy and warning it could happen in Korea.

40. Lee, Korea Old and New, p. 396. Between 1946 and 1976, the United States provided 12.6 billion dollars in economic and military assistance to South Korea. Most of this came in the form of grants so that Korea was able to rebuild from the war and start basic industries and not be burdened by debt. Between 1953 and 1962 the United States financed about 70 percent of Korea's imports and 80 percent of its fixed capital formation.

41. Stephen Linton, "Coverage of the United States in Korean Textbooks," a special study commissioned by the United States Information Service, 1988. Linton's comprehensive study of Korean textbooks at all levels of education indicates criticism of the United States is kept at a minimum, but little mention is made of American sacrifices in the Korean War or the U.S. role in rebuilding the Korean economy. College materials contain more criticism of the United States and are more tolerant toward communism.

Confucianism Defies the Computer
42. The story was distributed by the Yonhap News Agency, the semi-official government news agency.


44. "AmCham Attacks Overall Economic System in ROK," Korea Times, March 19, 1991. This particular article, though lacking attributions by name, was well-balanced with views of U.S. government and Korean government spokesmen on the major trade frictions.

45. There was a flurry of activity on trade issues during this period. Two economic ministers of the Korean government resigned, which the press ascribed to U.S. pressure. The government was issuing numerous press releases on what it was doing to improve relations with the United States. The reason: The impending visit of U.S. Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher.


47. Admiral Yi Sun-sin, a military hero in Korean history for defeating Japanese invaders in the 16th century with his iron-plated "Turtle Ships," wrote in a cruel fashion about his fellow Koreans. "Among our Korean people, out of every ten there are eight or nine fainthearted persons as against one or two lion hearts. Even in peace-time, when a crowd of people hears some terrorizing rumor, they stampede to take the lead in a race from the scene to save their own lives," he observed. Admiral Yi was killed in battle.


49. When Mikhail Gorbachev made his first visit to Korea in April of 1991, the government wanted a big welcome for the Soviet leader. At the suggestion of the Ministry of Information, the Korean Newspapers Association sent out by facsimile to the newspapers several pro-Soviet filler items that could be used on the occasion of Gorbachev's visit. A random sampling indicated the newspapers were not much interested.

50. Economic Planning Board statistics for 1985. Final data from a 1990 census had not been released, but tentative conclusions indicate a slightly younger average.

51. The Hankyoreh Shinmun is unique among Korea's newspapers. It was established in 1988 by reporters and editors, mainly from the Chosun Ilbo and Dong-A Ilbo, who had been jailed or fired in 1975 during a government purge of the media. Financial backing came from more than 58,000 supporters who, in effect, became stockholders. The newspaper has struggled financially since its inception, but it has carved out a niche among young readers, mainly because it challenges the Establishment. Its paid circulation is estimated at 600,000. It is called a leftist newspaper in Korea and might be comparable in its role to that of the alternative weeklies that flourished in the United States in the 1960s.


55. Song Jung-jea, president of the Pusan Ilbo, interview in his office, February 2, 1991. Mr. Song was once a presidential reporter in Chong Wa Dae, known as the Blue House. As president of the Pusan Ilbo, he serves at the pleasure of a board that has government ties.


57. Han Jong-woo, interview in Foreign Correspondents Club of Seoul, October 3, 1990.

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