Lecture 10

South Korea’s 20th century
politics, popular culture and the democracy movement

First Republic (第一共和國 제일공화국) 1948-1960

President: Syngman Rhee (李承晩 이승만 1875-1965)

- First Korean to obtain a PhD in America; married to an Austrian lady.
- Was hand chosen by Americans and flown back to Korea in October 1945 to be made the first President of the Republic of Korea (aka South Korea).
- Was not highly regarded by US, but known to be virulently anti-Communist.
- His government was responsible for: the bloody suppression of popular uprisings, in the name of anti-Communism, including the Jeju-do island massacre; the enactment of the National Security Law (國家保安法 구가보안법); the establishment of prison camps and mass execution of prisoners.

- When the Korean War broke out in June 1950 with North Korean army quickly advancing on Seoul, Rhee (having escaped south himself) ordered the bridge across the Han river on the southern edge of Seoul (now in the centre of Seoul) to be blown up killing hundreds of civilians would on the bridge at the time and stranding much of the South Korean army and many other civilians north of the river.

Post Korean War 1950s

- Americanization: emergence of consumer culture.
- Massive corruption in politics: between 1945-65 America gave $12 billion to South Korea with little control over how it was spent.
- Rhee Syngman used the National Security Law to oppress political opposition.
  - In 1958 he had the opposition leader Jo Bong-am (조봉암 1898-1959) arrested under the law and subsequently executed.

Popular culture

- During the 1950s, all women's traditional changgeuk musical theatre troupes (女性唱劇) enjoyed great popularity, peaking in the middle of the decade.
  - One of the most popular actresses was Im Chun-aeng (임춘영 1924-75) who performed the male lead roles.
From the mid 1950s, cinema enjoyed a revival, in particular period films (e.g. Yi Gyu-hwan's *Tale of Chunhyang* 춘향전 1955), melodramas (Han Hyeong-mo's *Madam Freedom* 자유부인 1956) and comedies (Yi Byeong-il's *Marriage Day* 시집가는 날 1956).

19 April 1960 Revolution (사일구 혁명)

- In March 1960 student protests erupted across the country following a rigged presidential election in which Rhee claimed 90% of the vote (after the opposition candidate had died of cancer).
- The protests intensified after the body of a 16 year old school boy, Kim Juyeol (김주열 1943–60) was found floating in Masan harbour with his face blown out by grenade shrapnel.
- On 19 April some 100,000 students demonstrated outside the presidential palace in Seoul demanding to see Syngman Rhee.
  - Palace guards fired into the crowd killing at least 115, and injuring 700.
  - Regular soldiers moved in to restore order but many supported the students.
  - This event is known as the 19 April Revolution or just "4.19" (사일구 사일구).
- On 25 April around 300 university professors held a peaceful demonstration calling for Syngman Rhee’s resignation.
  - 50,000 student demonstrators demolished the home of Rhee’s vice-president Yi Gi-pung whose own election had involved blatant vote rigging (he subsequently committed suicide together with his family).
- On 29 April, under pressure from America, Syngman Rhee eventually resigned from office and left to live the remainder of his life in Hawaii.

Second Republic (第一共和國 제일공화국) 1960–61

President: Yun Boseon (윤보선 1897–1990)

- On 12 August Yun Boseon was elected president but had no real power.
- Parliamentary system where power was with the prime minister and cabinet.

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1 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Vakt2zW9bA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Vakt2zW9bA)
• This was a brief era of hope during which censorship was relaxed; various books published were subsequently to be banned.

Military rule 1961–1993

Third Republic 1961–1972

Park Chung Hee (朴正熙 박정희 1917–79) 1961–79

• General Park Chung Hee came to power through a bloodless coup d'état on 16 May 1961.
• Was previously a primary school teacher and then Japanese army officer in the Manchukuo Imperial Army.
• Had fought in Manchuria against the guerilla fighters (though only after Kim Il Sung had been forced to retreat into Russian territory).
• He was never anti-Japanese.
• By the time of his assassination and through the 1980s Park Chung Hee was extremely unpopular but during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis a new nostalgia for his strength of character and economic policies reemerged.
• Unlike nearly all other presidents and politicians since, he is perceived as having not been personally corrupt: although his methods were harsh, he was genuinely devoted to the betterment of South Korea.
• Today, he is credited with the "miracle" economic development and industrialization of South Korea.
  o His poor human rights record is increasingly overlooked and or forgiven with the view that it was the necessary price for development helping to pull the greater part of the population out of poverty.
  o Park Chung Hee is the object of much revisionist history: it is very difficult to find unbiased source material on him.

• The previous president of South Korea (2013–2017), Park Geunhye (朴槿惠, 박근혜), is Park Chung Hee's eldest daughter.
  o Following the 1974 assassination of her mother, she assumed the role of the First Lady.
  o During her election campaign she strongly benefitted from the legacy of her father.
1960s

- The economy developed through focus on light industries and export.

"Golden age" of cinema and the Film Law.

- The period 1963–71 is described as Korea's "film renaissance".
- It saw the growth of colour and widescreen films; in particular colour was a means to compete with the introduction of nationwide TV broadcasting in 1966.
- Melodramas, period films and comedies continued to be popular but added to these were more thrillers, action and teenage genres.
- Action films were popular with boys and co-productions were made with Hong Kong.
- The film industry was supported and controlled by a series of film laws (映畵法 영화법) first introduced in 1962.
  - Only registered companies were allowed to produce films; many of the smaller films companies were forced to close.
  - Permission had to be obtained from the Minister for Public Information for each film before starting production.
  - Restricted the right to import foreign films to domestic film companies, so that the money made from foreign films (which were much more popular) would support the domestic film production.
  - From 1966, a screen quota system was introduced requiring cinemas to screen a certain number of Korean films for a certain number of days per year. This was aimed at countering the overwhelming popularity of foreign import films which were much higher production quality. Cinemas often found it more profitable to pay a fine and screen more foreign films.
  - Stricter censorship (検閲 검열) was also introduced. Films were often accused by the police of being obscene to public morals (e.g. melodramas with couples having affairs which had been popular in the 1950s), or pro-Communist (e.g. for portraying the enemy too sympathetically or South Korean society to negatively).

- The Film Law led to a huge increase in the number of Korean films being made, peaking in 1969 when 233 Korean films were produced with 659 cinemas operating across the country achieving total audience (including for foreign films) of 178 million.
- However, a few large companies were given a monopoly over the industry and many of them were just interested in making profits through import rights.
- Whilst many Korean films were being made, the production quality remained low.

1961

- Established the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA 中央情報部 중앙정보부).
  - Tortured and often killed suspects and political opponents; such methods were a continuation of the practices of the police force during the Japanese colonial era.

1965
Vietnam War

- Park Chung Hee agreed to send troops in return for billions of dollars in economic support from America.
  - Many Korean companies got contracts from America for construction in Vietnam; in particular steel and transportation.
  - In the same way Japan had profited from the Korean War, South Korea exploited the Vietnam War to stimulate its economic growth.

- In total over 320,000 Koreans served in Vietnam with numbers peaking at 49,869.
  - At least 5,000 were killed and 11,000 officially wounded in action whilst another 159,132 suffered aftereffects of chemical agents such as Agent Orange.
  - By 1973 all Korean troops had been withdrawn.
  - Korean troops are known to have committed massacres and rape in Vietnam.

Normalization of relations with Japan

- Despite widespread popular opposition and student led demonstrations, Park Chung Hee established diplomatic relations with Japan.
- Only in 2005 were details of the compensation received from Japan disclosed by the Korean government.
- The South Korean government accepted $800 million in ‘soft loans’ from Japan and, in return, agreed not to pursue any other individual or government claims for compensation.
  - This is one of the Japanese government’s arguments for not recognizing the legal cases of the former Comfort Women, even though, at the time, they had yet to be recognized by the South Korean government and so were not in any way represented during the normalization negotiations.
- The SK government demanded $364 million as compensation for the treatment of Koreans during the colonial period but it rejected a Japanese proposal to directly compensate individuals.
- The money received from Japan was invested in infrastructure projects.

1968

- 31 man North Korea commando team, Unit 124, attempted a failed raid on the presidential Blue House aiming to assassinate Park Chung Hee.
  - They got within 800 meters of the Blue House, whereupon a fire fight broke out.
  - 28 were killed, 2 were unaccounted for, 1 was captured and interrogated for a year before being released (and becoming a Christian pastor).
- In response Park established an equivalent 31 man commando team, Unit 684, who were trained under harsh conditions on Silmi-do island, but their mission to assassinate Kim Il Sung was ultimately called off after relations between North and South improved.

- Establishment of POSCO Iron and Steel company in the southeastern town of Pohang.
The great majority of investment and industrial development went to the southeast Gyeongsang provinces (former Silla homeland!) from where much of the political elite came from.

- By contrast the southwest Jeolla provinces received very little, exasperating regional discrimination and regionalist antipathies.

1970s

- During the 1970s Park Chung Hee became an absolute dictator.
- Censorship laws were tightened.
- Everyday life became increasingly oppressive.

New Village Movement (새마을 운동 sae-ma'eul undong)

- Launched in April 1970.
- Sought to modernize rural villages and address the growing wealth gap between towns and countryside: was more successful at the first than second.

  "The movement promoted self-help and co-operation among the people, as the central government provided a fixed amount of raw materials to each of the participating villages free of charge and entrusted the locals to build whatever they wished with them. Villages that demonstrated success were then granted additional resources."

- Previous to the movement nearly all villages had thatched houses; as a result of the movement houses were rebuilt with concrete and bright blue and orange tiles still seen today.
- In April 1972 the New Village Movement song (새마을 운동 노래) was composed by Park Chung Hee.²
  
  - It was played each morning and evening on radio and television everyday single day for the next 7 years!
- In 1975 the movement was expanded to factories and towns.
- The movement is generally regarded as having been successful and even today it is promoted by the South Korean government and studied by poorer countries.
- There’s a class of train named after it, the Saemaeul-ho, which was the fastest and most comfortable before the introduction of the high-speed KTX.

Jeon Tae-il self immolation

- On 13 November 1970, Jeon Tae-il (전태일 1948–70) poured petrol over himself and set it alight at the notorious textile Peace Market (평화시장)³ by Cheonggye-cheon stream, whilst waving the Labour Standards Act as a demonstration against the harsh working conditions of women workers.

2 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiafEyklqxU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiafEyklqxU)
3 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BICXWSYJhKl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BICXWSYJhKl)
• Jeon Tae-il had also been a worker at the Peace Market; he discovered the Labour Standards Act (勤勞基準法 근로기준법) which, on paper, protected the rights of workers but was being entirely ignored.
• Afterwards his mother formed the Cheonggye Garment Workers’ Union which remained active throughout the 1970s at a time when all forms of labour organization were being severely suppressed.  

1971

• In August, the Unit 684 commandos mutinied on Silmi-do island.
  o Killing their guards, they crossed to the mainland and hijacked a bus to Seoul.
  o 20 were killed or committed suicide with hand grenades in the subsequent shootout; 4 were captured and executed on 10 March 1972.
  o Events were dramatized in the film Silmido (2003).

1972

Fourth Republic and the Yusin Constitution (維新憲法 유신헌법)

• In October 1972 Park Chung Hee declared a Fourth Republic and issued the new Yusin Constitution.
  o "Yusin" (維新 유신, Japanese ishin) means "revitalization" and is the same word used by Japanese for the 1868 Meiji "Restoration".
  o Abolished direct presidential elections, with the president to be chosen instead by the newly established "Unified Body (juche) Citizens’ Council" controlled by Park.
  o One third of the National Assembly also to be chosen directly by the president.
  o Other clauses gave the president near absolute power over all aspects of the government.
  o Presidential term extended to 6 years and the limit on the number of terms a president can serve was abolished, making Park president for life.

Possible reasons for the Yusin system:

• In July 1969 President Nixon introduced the "Nixon Doctrine" which involved withdrawing American troops and having allied countries rely on their own manpower.
• 20,000 American troops were subsequently withdrawn from South Korea down to 42,000.
• In February 1972 America opened relations with the Republic of China leaving Seoul feeling threatened
• In the 1971 elections, Park Chung Hee almost lost to popular opponent, future president, Kim Dae Jung.

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4 Jeon Tae-il's sister, Chun Soonok, since became an academic and author of (2003) They are Not Machines: Korean Women Workers and Their Fight for Democratic Trade Unionism in the 1970s.
"...emergency decrees flew out of the Blue House like bats at dusk in the early 1970s. One 1973 decree declared all work stoppages to be illegal, and the infamous no. 9 in 1974 more or less made any criticism of the regime a violation of national security." (Cumings 2005:363)

"By the Yushin period the KCIA was a complete rogue institution, using its immense power at will to reward friends and punish enemies... Its agents were everywhere, not just in all potentially oppositional political groups but in newspaper offices, radio and TV stations, company unions, college classrooms in Korea – even in college classrooms in the United States." (Cumings 2005:370)

1972

On 4 July a North–South Joint Communiqué (7·4 남북 공동 성명) announced.

- Negotiated secretly by the North and South in response to America establishing relations with China.
- The first clause laid out three principles of unification:
  I. Unification shall be achieved through independent Korean efforts without being subject to external imposition or interference.
  II. Unification shall be achieved through peaceful means, and not through the use of force against each other.
  III. As a homogenous people, a great national unity shall be sought above all, transcending differences in ideas, ideologies and systems.

1974

- On 15 August, during a liberation day celebration event at which Park was delivering a speech, an assassination attempt, by a Japanese born North Korean sympathizer, Mun Se-gwang (문세광 1951–74).
- Resulted in the death of Park’s wife and a local high school girl, Jang Bonghwa (장봉화), who was in the choir.
  - No compensation was ever paid to Jang’s family.
  - Park was afterwards devastated by his wife’s death and wrote poems talking of his longing for her.
  - It briefly made him more popular, but also saw him become increasingly dictatorial.

Film, music and continuing censorship

- The 1970s is regarded as the "dark age" of film as production and audience numbers rapidly decreased owing to stricter censorship, propaganda "enlightenment" films (啓蒙映畵 계몽영화) being screened before the main features and the spread of television which broadcast dramas.

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The first television broadcasts began in 1956 and KBS went on air in 1966. By the 1970s there were three channels. Between 1971 and 1979, television set ownership increased from just over 10% to 79.1%.

To legitimize the blatant dictatorship, government propaganda began to re-emphasize Neo-Confucian values which demanded the people act as loyal citizens to their enlightened ruler. Films portraying themes of personal sacrifice for the sake of the group (멸사봉공), defense of the country (호국), loyal servitude (충효) and films **establishing ethno-national subjectivity** (juche) (민족주체성의 확립) and which "encourage a citizenship of patriotism and ethnic pride" (애국애족의 국민성을 고무하는 영화) were all promoted (sounding not at all dissimilar to North Korea).

Music experienced similar issues with censorship of lyrics with many songs being banned. On 29 June 1975, the JoongAng Ilbo newspaper published a list of 43 songs which had been banned together with the official reasons why. Amongst the reasons for each song, 24 were described as "vulgar" (低俗 저속 jeosok) and 14 as "corrupt" (頹廢 퇴폐 toeoye), 3 for being "too Japanese" (日本色 일본색 ilbon-saek) and 2 for being "too sad" (悲嘆调 비탄조 bitan-jo).

All popular music artists were "obliged" to put so-called morally "healthy songs" (健全歌謠 건전가요 geonjeon-gayo) or military songs at the end of their albums; as these were cassettes people would fast-forward and rarely listened to them.

**Sin Jung-hyeon (신중현 b.1938): singer/guitarist/composer**

- The godfather of Korean rock and psychedelic music, became popular during the 1960s.
- Composed music for many of the most popular singers of the time including the Pearl Sisters, Lee Jeong-hwa (이경화), Kim Chuja (김추자).
- In 1972 he was asked to write a song for Park Chung Hee; he ignored the request and instead wrote **Beautiful Rivers and Mountains** (아름다운 강산 a'reumda'un gang-san). His next song, **Beautiful Person** (미인 mi'in) was banned for being too vulgar and noisy.
- In 1975 he was arrested for marijuana usage and banned from performing until Park Chung Hee’s death; this effectively ended his career.

In real life, there were **police inspections teams or raids** (단속 dansk ).

These included:

  - Hair must not touch the back the collar or ears.
  - Would be cut on the spot or at the local police station.
- Miniskirt inspections for women (미니스커트 단속) introduced in 1973.
  - Measured from the knee upwards there was to be no more than 20cm of exposed flesh.

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6 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHa5DbzdC34](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SHa5DbzdC34)
1979 Assassination and coup d'état

- Growing popular demonstrations by workers and students against Park Chung Hee, in the southeast of the country (home to the heavy industries).
- On 26 October, at a private dinner Park Chung Hee and his bodyguard were shot dead by KCIA director Kim Jaegyu (김재규 1926–80) who was himself afterwards executed.

- On 12 December, Major General Chun Doo Hwan (전두환 b.1931) and General Roh Tae Woo (노태우 b.1932) carried out a coup d'état.

Fifth Republic

Chun Doo Hwan (전두환 b.1931) rule 1980–88

- Chun Doo Hwan was another dictator.
- All newspapers were required to show a picture of Chun Doo Hwan on the front cover of every single edition.
- Much of his rule was marked by violent oppression, but also growing popular resistance and increasing labour union organization and strikes.

- Unlike Park Chung Hee, he was personally corrupt.

- Established a series of labour prison camps in the mountains estimated to have had some 37,000 people (journalists, students, teachers, labour organizers and civil servants) imprisoned under the National Security Law.
- KCIA renamed Agency of National Security Planning (ANSP 국가안전企劃部) but continued as the primary instrument of fear and repression.
• In the 1990s it was revealed the ANSP had a budget of around $1 billion and, from amongst 70,000 employees, almost no senior officials from the southwestern Jeolla-do provinces.

1980s
• Martial law (戒嚴令 계엄령): curfews each night.
• A good portrayal of this era is Boong Jun-hoo’s thriller *Memories of Murder* (2003 살인의 추억).

1980

**18 May Gwangju Massacre** (5.18 오일팔 o-il-pal)
• Following Chun Doo Hwan’s coup, popular demonstrations continued to grow both in Seoul and across the country.
• On 17 May, Chun declared martial law closing universities, dissolving the National Assembly, banning all political activity and arresting thousands during the night.

• The following day, in Gwangju city (capital of South Jeolla-do province), around 500 people held a demonstration against martial law.
  - Paratroopers, specifically chosen from other regions, and possibly on drugs, were sent into the city where they began indiscriminate killing.
  - Local Gwangju citizens fought back and began to organize themselves.
  - By 21 May, the citizens had retaken control of the city: they estimate around 500 dead and 960 people missing.
  - On 28 May, more disciplined troops were sent and secured the city: many citizens refusing to surrender were killed.
• America, who had command over the Korean military, did nothing.
• The final death toll is thought to be around 2,000.

• Chun Doo Hwan blamed the Gwangju uprising on opposition activist Kim Dae Jung, and had him sentenced to death, later commuted to life imprisonment following pressure from America and the Pope, and allowed him to go to America in 1982.

1983
• In October Chun Doo Hwan survived a bomb explosion planted by North Korean agents whilst visiting the Myanmar capital of Rangoon.

1985
• Kim Dae Jung returned from America to Korea but kept under house arrest.

1986
• Seoul successfully hosted the 10th Asian Games: had originally meant to host the 1970 Asian Games but they had been moved to Bangkok following threats from North Korea.
  • Desire to host such international events put pressure on the military government to lessen social oppression and abuse.

1987

June Democracy movement
• Strikes and student demonstrations continued to increase.
• On 9 June 1987 during a pre-demonstration demonstration(!) at Yonsei University, 22 year old student Yi Han-yeol (이한열 1966–87) was shot in the back of the head by a tear gas canister fired horizontally by the riot police.
  • A Reuters news agency photographer captured the moment as Han-yeol's friend, Yi Jongchang, carried him away: the photograph was printed both in the JoongAng Ilbo newspaper and the New York Times. Yi Han-yeol died on 5 July.
  • The following day, mass demonstrations were held across the country in response to attempts by the police to cover up the torture and death of Seoul National University student Park Jongchol (1964–87) back in January.
  • Finally on 29 June General Roh Tae Woo announced a free and fair, direct presidential election for December, allowing even Kim Dae Jung to participate.
Repression on labour organization was relaxed allowing for the expansion of labour activities however trade unions' involvement in politics remained illegal until 1998. Between July and October around 3,400 labour disputes, usually over wages, were held.

- On 29 November a bomb detonated midair on Korean Air Flight 858 killing all 104 passengers (all but two of whom are South Korean) and 11 crew members.
  - The flight was between Baghdad and Seoul with scheduled stopovers in Abu Dhabi and Bangkok.
  - Two North Korean agents, a male (aged 70) and female (aged 25), had planted the bomb before disembarking at Abu Dhabi. The agents were located in Bahrain where they attempted to commit suicide by smoking cyanide laced cigarettes. The male, Kim Seung-il, died but the female, Kim Hyeonhui (김현희 b.1962) was caught and transported to Seoul. She testified that Kim Jong Il personally gave the order for the attack and was sentenced to death before being pardoned by Roh Tae Woo.

- In December, Roh Tae Woo won the first free and fair presidential election after the two opposition candidates Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung ran against each other, splitting the opposition vote.
  - Chun Doo Hwan retired to a Buddhist temple (not forever).

Sixth Republic 1988~present

Roh Tae Woo (盧泰愚 노태우 b.1932) administration 1988–93

- Former general and same graduating class as Chun Doo Hwan.
- In charge of the 1988 Summer Olympic Games' preparations giving him much international exposure

- Pursued a *Nordpolitik "northern politics" policy* modelled on West Germany's "Ostpolitik" with the aim of improving relations with China and Russia.
- In 1989 diplomatic relations were established with Hungary (Feb), Poland (Nov), Yugoslavia (Dec) and with Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria in March 1990; finally also with Romania.
- In 1990 Roh became the first South Korean president to visit Moscow.
- The following year, on Roh's lobbying and with China's support, North and South Korea joined the UN simultaneously.
- In 1992 full diplomatic relations were established between South Korea and the People's Republic of China (upsetting Taiwan).

"...without the Olympics and the bridge-building approach Roh had used, it is doubtful that things would have happened so fast. As it is, "northern politics" stands as the great success of postwar Korean diplomacy. By persuading just about everyone to welcome Korea as a useful partner, the Republic of Korea for the first time broke out of its isolation." (Gibney 1992:111)^

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1988 Seoul Summer Olympics

- Represented South Korea’s emergence on the global stage, enhancing its international legitimacy over North Korea.

Kim Young Sam (金泳三 김영삼 b.1927) administration 1993–98

- South Korea’s first democratically elected civilian president.
- Together with Kim Dae Jung, Kim Young Sam had led the political opposition to Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan.
- Unlike Kim Dae Jung, Kim Young Sam was from the city of Pusan in the conservative southeast of the country.
- He retained the ANSP and continued to use the National Security Law against labour union organizers.

1996

- Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo were brought to trial for their 1979 coup d'état and imprisoned.
- Chun Doo Hwan was initially sentenced to death but this was commuted to life imprisonment; Roh Tae Woo was sentenced to 17 years in jail however both were subsequently pardoned by Kim Young Sam and released the following year.
- Both Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo had enormous slush funds of money they had accumulated during their time in power.


- Unlike the political elite, Kim Dae Jung was from Mokpo in the southwest Jeolla provinces.
- Led the political opposition against Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan.
- Spent years in prison and survived at least one assassination attempt by Park Chung Hee when in 1973, whilst visiting Japan, he was kidnapped, drugged and taken out on a boat by KCIA agents where he believed he was to be drowned if not for the intervention of America.
  - As a devout Catholic, he received strong support and protection from America.

1976.3  Imprisoned under the Park regime for issuing a declaration for democracy and national salvation"

1979.12.8  Released four days before the Chun Doo Hwan coup.

1980.5.17  Arrested and held in solitary confinement, suspected of being behind the student demonstrations.

1980.8.1  Indicted on the first day of his trial alongside 23 other professors, pastors, politicians, writers and student activists.
  - The trial was a political show trial: Kim Dae Jung and other defendants' testimonies were heavily censored in the press.
  - On the 19th day of the trial, Kim Dae Jung was sentenced to death.
"Kim Dae Jung’s career as a democratic reformer evolved from his formative years as a son of the Jeolla region and his observations of [Syngman] Rhee's heavy-handed rule. From this background sprung his view on how to deal with North Korea, whose forces he never had to face in combat, and then his hostility toward all that conservatives in Seoul were doing to oppress their and his people." (Kirk 2009:96)

During his time in power:

- Pursued the Sunshine Policy of engagement with North Korea.
- Failed to revise or abolish the National Security Law due to decreasing popularity in light of the IMF reforms and political capital spent on the Sunshine Policy.

1997 Asian Financial Crisis

- Kim Dae Jung came to the presidency during the height of the Asian Financial Crisis.
- Known to Koreans as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) crisis due to the restructuring conditions the IMF imposed on the Korean jaebeol conglomerates (財閥 제벌).
- South Korean public donated gold to help pay off the countries debt to the IMF.
  - The last was paid off in 2001.

Sunshine Policy  

- Highest point was the 2000 June inter-Korean summit meeting held in Pyongyang with Kim Dae Jung becoming the first South Korean leader to visit North Korea.
- Between 1999–2003, Hyundai paid some $600 million to the North Korean regime, bankrupting the conglomerate and leading to its breakup.

"The scandal was transfixing since the bribes were paid by an elected government in pursuit of a controversial policy to a dictatorship that South Korea’s ministry of national defense had described in annual white papers as its "main enemy" until DJ [Kim Dae Jung] banned the term after the June 2000 summit. Activists [during the 1980s] had been indicted for violating the National Security Law by going to North Korea, spreading North Korean influence, maybe informing or spying, but none had ever been accused of passing bribes to the North." (Kirk 2009:201)

- In total anywhere between $3 and $8 billion may have been transferred to North Korea by Hyundai and the Kim Dae Jung administration. (See Kirk 2009:204–5)

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