

Panel Two: Anti-Americanism Old and New: Outside Europe

**Two Years after:
Rethinking Young Anti-Americanism in South Korea**

By: Youngshik Bong, Ph.d.

ybong@wellesley.edu

Freeman Post-doctoral Fellow
Department of Political Science
Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA
USA

Paper presented at

International Conference on “Past and Present: Is There Anything New with Anti-Americanism Today?”

Center for Policy Studies at Central European University. Budapest, Hungary

December 11-12, 2004.

Comments welcome.

“As we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns -- the ones we don't know we don't know.” Donald Rumsfeld, U.S. Secretary of Defense.*

I. Introduction

Over two years have passed since the controversy over the not-guilty verdict handed down by U.S. court-martial for alleged negligent homicide committed by two U.S. service members, who drove an armored vehicle over, and killed two junior-high school Korean students during a military exercise in December 2002. This event triggered the outbreak of an anti-American movement in the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Depending on how one looks at it, this period in time may be ripe to understand the nature of anti-Americanism in South Korea, or it may be too premature to figure out where it came from and where it is heading. Although anti-Americanism has become a sort of a handy jargon for many, it appears that there are still a number of issues that remain unexplained or underspecified. Perhaps it is an opportune time for everyone who has engaged in the “anti-Americanism cottage industry” to ponder if we have accumulated enough knowledge and gained strong enough analytical grips to handle the delicate and complex nature of Korean anti-Americanism.

Despite the fact that the international media regularly covers Korea-U.S. relations, and that commentators of various political backgrounds and leanings have eagerly come out of the woodwork to offer their views on the status of the alliance and the causes of tensions, there seem to be only two areas of agreement: 1) the alliance is changing; 2) Korean youth are endangering the alliance with their sense of nationalism and anti-Americanism. This is a surprisingly meager yield, given all the political energy, policy interest, and academic inquiry that have been invested in the new cottage industry in the last few years.

And yet, to what extent do Korean youth serve as what one analyst calls the “wildcard” in the future of the alliance relationship?¹ Do Korean youth no longer breathe the same air as their elders? Are they such a distinct political group that new policies need to be developed to reflect their interests? To win them back to the old ways? To snap them out of their immature reverie? To what extent does the youth factor (or generational gap) explain the causes, characteristics, and consequences of the recent popular

* Hart Seely, “The Poetry of D.H. Rumsfeld: Recent works by the Secretary of Defense,” <http://slate.msn.com/id/2081042/#ContinueArticle>

¹ Seung-hwan Kim, “Yankee Go Home? A Historical View of South Korean Sentiment toward the United States, 2001-2004,” in Derek Mitchell, ed., *Strategy and Sentiment: South Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.-ROK Alliance*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2004, pp. 24-35.

expressions of anti-American sentiments? This paper is intended to be a refreshing exercise to rethink what we know and do not know about anti-Americanism.

I believe there is the need to carefully examine the assumption that often passes as confirmed causality—that new nationalism among Korean youth generates anti-Americanism that in turn endangers the bilateral alliance and the national security of Korea. I show that numerical correlations between age and so-called anti-American sentiments are both limited and inconsistent. Rather, contextual analysis—the effect of democratization within Korea, transnationalization of political movements, and the evolving regionalization of pop culture and identities—complicates the assumed nationalism and undermines the simplistic explanation of generation change. I emphasize that political sentiment and popular expression do not necessarily translate into political interest and policy choices. To that end, I illustrate the rather stable and practical responses to the new disruptions and changes in the bilateral relationship in 2004, irrespective of generation and sentiment towards the U.S.

II. **Anti-Americanism: *Young and Reckless?***

2002 and 2003 were filled with alarmist, apocalyptic outcries and laments over the “end of the bilateral security alliance,” “South Korea choosing North Korea over the United States,” and “the U.S. abandoning ‘ungrateful’ South Korea.” What particularly troubled Korean observers on both sides of the Pacific was the seemingly “emotional” and “irrational” basis of the drifting alliance. In particular, the observers felt that youthful ignorance, short-sightedness, and “wishful thinking” (that North Koreans are not so dangerous and that South Koreans can afford to alienate the U.S.) abounded. These factors supposedly created the notion that: “Such is the temper of the times that South Korea’s most popular ‘bubblegum pop’ girl band—a heretofore entirely apolitical group with a reputation for extreme wholesomeness—released a harshly anti-American MTV-style video,” Nicholas Eberstadt observed in his article in the *National Interest* (Fall 2002). To underscore the correlation between naïveté and youth, he highlighted a 2001 survey of fifth and sixth graders in south Kyongsang Province, one of the most conservative regions in the South, which found that 42% “identified North Korea as ‘the friendliest nation toward South Korea,’” with the U.S. playing second fiddle (39%).² He blamed the Kim Dae Jung administration and its overly optimistic brand of engagement policy for swaying the Korean public towards foolhardiness. Eberstadt is not a lone voice; such judgments abound in the United States, Korea, and other East Asian nations.

A more serious Korean academic who has been following these issues similarly noted the ascendance of younger generations into the political fray:

One consequence of democratization and institutional reforms has been the economic decline of the older generation and the rise of the younger generation.... The older generation is also being pushed to the political and social sidelines. This generation is perceived as supporting the status quo and resistant to reform.... In addition, [the younger generation's] easy access to information [technologies] and

² Nicholas Eberstadt, “Our Other Korea Problem,” *National Interest* (fall 2002), p. 113.

ability to create and mobilize political networks gives them the ability to be an effective political force.³

Indeed, age and support for the U.S. and the bilateral relationship do correlate. Even pre-democratization, in 1985, 78% of the youth (versus 56% of the general public) believed that “Korea was too closely identified with the United States.”⁴ Major Korean surveys conducted between 1990 and 1992 also revealed that a higher proportion of those in their twenties (even more so among college students) held a negative opinion of the United States than people in their fifties and older.⁵ In the midst of heavy protests in the winter of 2002-03, a U.S. State Department survey found that the younger generation viewed the U.S. less favorably than older respondents (favorable: 32% of 20s and 69% of 50s+). Moreover, only 22% of the 20s cohort versus 42% of the 50+ group considered the U.S. military presence in Korea to be “very important.”⁶

It is in fact true, that the labors of the past for a democratic society in South Korea have produced not only new laws, political institutions, and unexpected configurations of social mobilization. They have also produced progressive-minded, experimentation-oriented, and outspoken youth who seem to confound the worldview and political sensibilities of older Koreans and most Americans. Although no one on either side of the Pacific outwardly blames democracy for making a mess of the fifty-year-old alliance, Koreans and Americans both have eagerly echoed each other’s “explanation” that younger Koreans are to blame for the tensions, misunderstandings, and divergent interpretations and priorities between the two countries.

But younger Koreans are not unique in their critical attitudes towards the United States. According to the 2002 Pew Global Attitudes survey, 44% of Canadians below 30 years of age had unfavorable views of the U.S., compared to 20% in the 50-64 age group.⁷ Two decades earlier, during a time of anti-nuclear/anti-U.S. protests led by the Greens and other progressives in West Germany, “[t]he German rejection of and mistrust toward the United States” was “especially pronounced among the younger generation.”⁸ Moreover, France and Germany, who in recent years have become the featured anti-American nations in Europe, defy the general correlation between nationalism and anti-Americanism.

³ Sook-Jong Lee, "The Rise of Korean Youth as a Political Force: Implications for the U.S.-Korea Alliance," paper presentation, June 16, 2004. Available through the Center for Northeast Asia Policy Studies, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution.), p.20. www.brookings.edu/fp/cnaps/events/20040616.htm (Access date: July 5, 2004).

⁴ W. Scott Thompson, “Anti-Americanism and the U.S. Government,” Thomas Perry Thornton, ed. *Anti-Americanism: Origins and Context*, special edition of *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Washington, DC: SAIS, Johns Hopkins University, 1988), p. 25.

⁵ Gi-Wook Shin, “South Korean Anti-Americanism: A Comparative Perspective,” *Asian Survey* 36: (August 1996), pp. 795-796.

⁶ U.S. Department of State, Office of Research, “Opinion Analysis: Trends in South Korean Opinion of the U.S.,” April 9, 2003. Face-to-face interviews with 1556 adults were conducted in Korea during January 24-February 4, 2003.

⁷ Pew 2002, p. 56.

⁸ Paul Hollander, *Anti-Americanism: Irrational and Rational* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1995), p. 382.

According to the categories of nationalism established by the 2003 Pew Global Attitudes Project, France and Germany “are among the least likely, of all nations surveyed, to say their culture is superior, that their way of life needs protection, and that other lands really belong to their countries.”⁹ Nationalism may be a compelling argument for those seeking a neat and quick explanation for the seeming anti-Americanism around the world, but the concept is difficult to define and disaggregate, and simply put, it explains too little.

Similarly, however compelling the idea may seem, youth itself does not explain foreign policy orientation, and it does not necessarily translate into historical amnesia, blind nationalism, radicalism, or anti-Americanism. For example, in Japan, the traditional “enemy” of the modern Koreans, it is the older generation that keeps its eyes, ears, and minds closed to the realities of Japan’s war atrocities. Despite the negative repercussions for Japan’s regional and international status, the younger generations are more eager to step up to the historical plate and acknowledge past wrongs, mend old wounds, and forge new friendships with their regional neighbors. Younger Japanese busily exchange views on the internet, work together with Korean NGOs, and admire the cultural products (film, videos, music) imported from their nation’s ex-colony. And in turn, Korea’s most popular internet portal, Daum, recently hosted 10,000 blogs and cafes dedicated to introducing Japanese culture to South Korea. This is compared to just 50 blogs and cafes that promote anti-Japanese views. A newspaper survey also indicated that only a quarter of Koreans in their 20s said ‘they did not like Japan.’¹⁰ Since the Kim Dae Jung administration’s initial elimination of legal prohibitions against Japanese cultural imports in 1998, and the lifting of bans on imported Japanese music, films, computer games, and comics in early 2004,¹¹ Korean youth have become avid consumers and producers of a pop culture that is sweeping the East Asian region. The *Financial Times* called this “Korean Wave” a “phenomenon.”

In a sense, Asian youth are overcoming this conventional nationalism through the regionalization of pop culture, making connections across national and historical boundaries and stepping away from old enmities that governments and older generations seem unable or unwilling to give up. Donald McIntyre of *Time* magazine (Asia) describes the dizzying popularity of “K-pop” (Korean pop music) in recent years:

The \$300 mil domestic market is the second largest in Asia, topped only by Japan’s massive \$2.9 billion in album sales last year [2003]. K-pop has broken across borders: teenagers from Tokyo to Taipei swoon over performers such as singer Park Ji Yoon and boy band Shinhwa, buying their CDs and posters and even learning Korean so they can sing along at karaoke. BoA [an iconic Korean female singer] this year became the first solo artist in more than two decades to have a debut single and a debut album reach No. 1 in Japan.... ‘Korea is like the next

⁹ Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2003., p. 95.

¹⁰ *Financial Times* (London), August 7, 2004 (http://0-web.lexis-nexis.com.luna.wellesley.edu/universe/document?_m=550feba8dae55f... (Access date: October 13, 2004)

¹¹ *Ibid.*

epicenter of pop culture in Asia,' says Jessica Kam, a vice president for MTV Networks Asia.¹²

Such developments are not without some cost to American power and influence. Japanese anthropologist, Koichi Iwabuchi, observes that there is a connection between the relative decline of American cultural power and the rise of "localized," "Asianized" pop in much of East Asia in the last decade.¹³

Such observations should not be mistaken for wishful thinking that hip hop and film can bridge decades of mutual suspicion and hostility and pave the way for cooperation and peace for the future generations in Asia. Indeed, a survey published in the well-known monthly, *Wolgan Chosun*, (June 30, 2002) found that 60.3% of Koreans in their 20s had unfavorable views of Japan, as opposed to 39.7% with favorable views. Yet, the article emphasizes that there is a substantial generational gap in anti-Japanese nationalist sentiment between the young and those in their 50s. Among the latter, only 17.7% had favorable views of Japan, while a decisive 73% had unfavorable views. The causes of the generational shift in such sentiments are not clear, but if "soft power" through cultural attraction, imitation, and adoption is as potent a facilitator of shared values and supportive actions between national communities as Joseph Nye purports, then the increasingly shared culture among East Asian youth may be more politically loaded than we currently recognize.¹⁴ It is not impossible to imagine the evolution of novel and creative regional identities among Asians in the next fifty years.

To focus on nationalism as a main cause of anti-Americanism without placing it in the context of broader social and cultural trends in East Asia is misleading. Globalization and regionalization are powerful forces, coterminous and coexisting with nationalism. These forces challenge and transform norms, laws, and institutions within societies. For example, South Korea and the Philippines rank among the most nationalistic nations surveyed by Pew in 2003: 82% of Koreans and 81% of Filipinos believe that their way of life needs protection from foreign influence (compared to 51% of Germans, 63% of Japanese, and 64% of Americans). 90% of Koreans believe their culture is superior to others, compared to 33% of French, 40% of Germans, and 60% of Americans who hold such a view (Pew reminds us that majorities around the world, except in Western Europe, believe in the superiority of their own culture).¹⁵

But despite such overwhelmingly protectionist tendencies regarding foreign influence in Korea and the Philippines, support for globalization among Asian nations is highest in Korea and the second highest among the forty-four nations in the Pew 2003

¹² Donald Macintyre, "Flying Too High? The Korean pop music biz is Asia's hottest..." in www.time.com/time/asia/covers/1101020729/story.html (Access date: September 30, 2004).

¹³ Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), ch. 1.

¹⁴ Joseph S. Nye, Jr, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (NY: Public Affairs/Perseus Books, 2004).

¹⁵ Pew "Views of a Changing World," June 2003, pp. 93-95.

Global Attitudes survey. A whopping 84% of Koreans favorably view the impact of globalization on their country.¹⁶

Again, Koreans, who are highly homogeneous in terms of language, ethnicity, and cultural practices and are often described as highly ethnonationalistic, rank among the lowest in opposition to immigration restrictions. In 2003, only 7% “completely agree[d]” that more restrictions should be placed on entry into their country. This contrasts with 46% of Americans who “completely agree[d]” with the statement, even though Americans live in one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse societies. It is important to remember the rapid social, economic, and political changes that Korea has been undergoing since the 1990s. For example, nearly overnight, in comparison to earlier industrializing nations, South Korea became a labor-receiving country by the 1990s, with hundreds of thousands of migrant workers, documented and undocumented, coming from poorer countries, particularly China, Southeast and South Asia. Although some Koreans have exhibited xenophobic reactions to the foreigners, “the normative aspects of globalization—emphasis on human rights, democratization, pluralism and cross-culturalism—have helped fuel the MWMs [migrant workers movements]” in Korea.¹⁷ Even though resurgent nationalism can be a reaction to the pressures of globalization, Koreans tactically used globalization as a way to advance national power with outward-looking, cosmopolitan tendencies. Korean political scientist Chung-in Moon was one of many who emphasized the need for Koreans to adopt the more noble (normative) aspects of globalization:

[I]nward-looking and xenophobic biases cannot cope with the challenges of spontaneous globalization. Peace education, education for human capital formation and cross-cultural education constitute critical components of managed globalization.... [C]ross-cultural education assists individuals in transforming themselves into citizens of the world.¹⁸

Therefore, given the dynamism of Korean youth and their environmental context, it is illogical to attribute historical amnesia and resurgent nationalism to them as if those are the only political and cultural influences that surround them. In reality, it is the younger people, in their twenties and thirties and even some in the 40s, who have been developing a new consciousness about peace, human rights, and multicultural orientation in Korea and around the world. Leaders of the Korean House for International Solidarity (KHIS) and their people-to-people campaign toward Vietnam serve as just one example. Since the mid and late 1990s, KHIS has investigated and publicized both the atrocities Korean soldiers committed toward Vietnamese civilians during the Vietnam War, and the need for people-to-people reconciliation between Korea and Vietnam. In 2000, they helped organize a “goodwill mission” to Vietnam, in which Korean dentists and other medical professionals volunteered their services to Vietnamese villagers and their descendants who had suffered

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁷ Katharine H.S. Moon, “Migrant Workers’ Movements in Movements in Japan and South Korea,” in Craig N. Murphy, ed. *Egalitarian Politics in the Age of Globalization* (London: Palgrave, 2002), p. 195.

¹⁸ Chung-in Moon, “Globalization: Challenges and Strategies,” *Korea Focus* 3:3 (1995), p. 66.

violence by Korean troops.¹⁹ They have also organized and staged an annual music/arts festival to raise funds to assist Vietnamese victims of war, and have been working with *Hankyore Sinmun* to raise funds for a “peace park” to be built in Vietnam. They conducted such efforts while simultaneously participating in the social movement to revise the Status of Forces Agreement with the United States. In spring of 2002, one of the leaders of KHIS stated that their fundraising efforts for the Vietnam project drew larger sums than for any ‘anti-American’ protest or program.²⁰

The work of KHIS is noteworthy for three reasons related to U.S.-Korea relations. First, in contrast to American officials’ oft-mentioned complaint that Koreans only seek to criticize U.S. policies and actions but overlook their own government’s and nation’s faults, KHIS has insisted that Koreans must take responsibility for past wartime atrocities and assist those who have survived, and not only point fingers at Japan and the U.S. for military abuses. Second, contrary to popular view that nationalism is what drives anti-Americanism, KHIS is addressing an issue that is quite “anti-nationalist” and unpopular among Koreans, especially among political elites and veterans. Third, they are intent on using new democratic freedoms and the transnationalization of ideas and politics to address issues, interpretive frameworks, and audiences heretofore neglected or ignored by other Korean NGOs/activists as well as the general population.

Younger Koreans have also been at the forefront of forging peace movements and challenging the near-sacrosanct institution of the military draft. This has been made on distinct legal grounds that emphasize human rights and gender equality: 1) conscientious objector status;²¹ 2) internal military violence against conscripts; 3) gender discrimination (due to the work points system that automatically benefits males in employment situations).²² Such moves were inconceivable, let alone possible, during most of the Cold war years under military dictators. Regarding young Koreans as politically naïve or economically complacent because they grew up in times of relative wealth and stability does not make sense unless one also emphasizes the fact that they grew up in a social and political environment of relative freedom in the 1990s. They do not long for the right to speak out against the government or for independent opinions like their predecessors had in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s; they take it for granted. In addition, no form of authority--whether it be their own government or the U.S. government and its troops, is off limits to them. So, if political naiveté and economic complacency are consequences of political freedom, then, Korean youth must not be singled out for blame or admonishment.

Most important is the need to distinguish between youthful ideas/expressions and policy choices. In contrast to common belief, Korean youth are highly pragmatic and know how to differentiate between sentiment and interests, both personal and national. For example, although 68.5% of Koreans in their 20s versus 49.1% in their 50s had favorable views of North Korea in June, 2002 (compared to 29.6% and 40.5% of those in their 20s

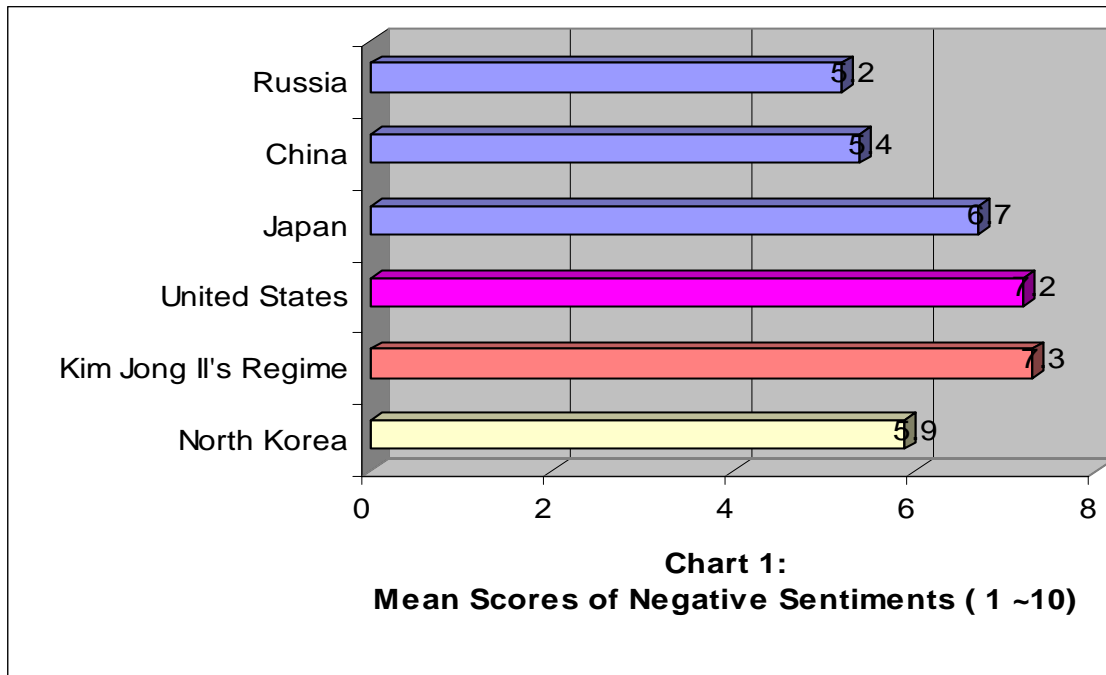
¹⁹ *Saram i saram ege* (Korean House for International Solidarity) (April/May 2000), pp. 16-20.

²⁰ Conversation with K. Moon, Ilsan.

²¹ Info on recent court cases and activism to be filled in later.

²² Cite S. Moon, *반미주의 연구* in Korean, 2004.

and their 50s respectively, who had unfavorable views), 82.6% of both age cohorts had unfavorable views of Kim Jong Il.²³ Haeshook Chae's analysis of a college student survey that involved 1,076 college students in 22 universities in Korea supports this claim.²⁴ Chae finds that young Koreans do know how to distinguish between their *feelings* toward North Korea as a people and their *judgment* of the North Korean regime/leadership. This finding implies that young Koreans are not as divergent in their collective attitude towards the issue of balancing national security and national reconciliation with the North as other generations. This is because they embrace North Korea as a part of the divided country, but loathe the regime as a source of threats and dictatorship.



Finally, the young generation in South Korea does not appear to be predisposed to prioritizing “nationalist” agendas at the expense of material gains. Young Koreans tend to approach ideological issues such as patriotism, nationalism, unification, and sovereign independence on normative and ideal grounds. But, once these issues directly affect their personal interests, they can show a remarkable turnaround.

I argued in another discussion of anti-Americanism in South Korea that such dualism results in apparently self-contradictory reactions and positions. For example,

²³ <http://srch.chosun.com/cgi-bin/www/search?did=1010847&OP=5&word=...> (Access date: April 15, 2003).

²⁴ Haeshook Chae, “Understanding Anti-Americanism among College Students in Korea,” APSA conference paper, Chicago, IL, September 1-3, 2004.

Koreans in their 20s and 30s may “think negatively of America, but many of them prefer to have U.S. citizenship. They denounced the U.S. war against Iraq as unjust invasion, but support the government decision to dispatch troops for U.S.-Korean cooperation over the North Korean issue.”²⁵ Again, the young know how to distinguish between perception/sensibility and choice/decision. More significantly, I highlighted their one constancy: They acknowledge the importance of the alliance relationship and support it for the sake of national security and economic stability. Again, the numbers bear this out: In April 2003, after several months of intense public demonstrations against U.S. policies and decisions, *Donga Ilbo* found that large majorities of Koreans in their 20s and 30s were in agreement with their older counterparts in acknowledging the importance of the U.S. military presence for security assurance on the Korean peninsula (20s: 78.1%; 30s: 84.3%; 40s: 86.4%; 50s: 89.3%).²⁶

Therefore, the alarmist arguments for “young and reckless” anti-Americanism brewing in South Korea and its pro-North Korean inclination are exaggerated in their tones and underspecified in their causal mechanisms. It will be a gross misunderstanding if young Koreans are collectively deemed pro-North Korean dissidents or antagonistic nationalists, and their activism portrayed as one of destructive hostility.

III. “Missing Anti-Americanism”: Nationalist Sentiment v. Policy Preference

In retrospect, there are reasons to be surprised by the way that both sides of the Pacific have come to terms with the phenomenon of anti-Americanism since the eruption of massive protests in the winter of 2002-03. Considering all the disruption and commotion, policy has been managed in a surprisingly calm, effective, and unruffled manner.²⁷ First, both countries successfully concluded a sixteen-month negotiation on relocation and reduction of the U.S. Forces in South Korea (USFK). The negotiations were inevitably arduous, checkered with push-and-pulls and give-and-takes between the two governments over the timing and the scale of the reconfiguration of the security alliance. However, it should be noted that the negotiations were in neither dominated by violent emotionalism from the public, nor by a perception of mutual abandonment, in any significant way. The negotiations were focused on streamlining the USFK in the context of global restructuring, while leaving no security void in Korea and augmenting the combat readiness and deterrent capability of the ROK forces.

Once the U.S. notified the Korean authorities of its decision to pull out a brigade of the USFK in May 2004, there were sporadic attempts by the conservative mass media to portray the U.S. decision as setting South Korea up as a model in order to demonstrate that the United States would never station its troops in a country where they are not welcome. In short, the conservatives sought to prove how reckless and short-sighted young liberals

²⁵ Youngshik Bong, “Yongmi: Pragmatic Anti-Americanism in South Korea,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 10:2 (winter/spring 2004), p. 161.

²⁶ <http://donga.com/fbin/news?f=print&n=200304010323> (Access date April 14, 2003).

²⁷ For a survey of changes in public opinion and the crisis of the Korea-U.S. alliance, see Nae-young Lee and Han-wol Jung, “Banmi yeoron gwa hanmi dongmaeng (Anti-American Sentiment and the Korea-U.S. Alliance),” *gukgajeonrak*, 9, 3, 2003, pp. 57-82.

(radicals) had been with respect to national security. Yet, such attempts to stir up the underlying fear in the Korean public in order to attack the government's foreign policy, did not appear to be effective. The general perception of the change in the alliance system was remarkably measured and stable. It was largely in agreement with the message articulated by President Roh Moo Hyun in his speech on the Independence Day, 2003, where he emphasized that it was a necessary and somewhat an overdue cost that Korea should be ready to assume. Considering the widely accepted warning two years ago that, if mismanaged, the talks on the reduction of the USFK would easily become "[l]ike the worst divorces [and] the emotional results of dissolving the alliance could be worse than the situation that led to the break in the first place,"²⁸ one needs to ask what prevented the negotiations on force restructuring from producing "profound bitterness and lasting resentment between the two allies," as occurred in the U.S.-Philippines alliance more than a decade ago.

Furthermore, South Korea has been consistent in rendering support for the U.S. war effort in Iraq. The Roh government sent 660 medics and engineers (*Jema* and *Seohee* units) one month after the presidential inauguration. Coping with worsening situations in the post-war Iraq, the U.S. subsequently requested that South Korea send additional troops, mainly composed of combat units, and on a far larger scale. After long deliberations, the National Assembly passed a bill to sanction additional troop deployment for the purpose of peacekeeping. The troops were officially deployed to help rebuild the Kurdish-controlled northern Iraqi town of Irbil in early August.

For those who acknowledge that the Roh Moo Hyun regime was heavily indebted to anti-American sentiment for its victory in the 2002 presidential elections, these developments should be regarded as a big surprise. This is because the dispatch of the Korean troops in Iraq has been one of the most divisive issues in domestic politics since the inauguration of the Roh government. Enlarging its involvement in the Iraq war was hardly a popular political choice for the political leadership in Korea. For example, according to a spring 2003 survey of 1,542 college students in Korea, 88.3% regarded the Iraq war as an "imperial invasion" by the United States. Only 4.7% of the respondents defined the war as a just war.²⁹ The results of the Gallup Korea opinion survey conducted on all age groups in March, 2003 yielded similar results: Only 9.7% of the respondents said that they agreed with the war aims that the United States officially articulated to justify its decision to attack Iraq. 75.5% were against any type of military involvement, even in the case the United States would seek for more assistance. Only 16.1% said that Korea should send its troops to Iraq, about 13.1% down from the level of support during the 1991 Gulf War.³⁰ Opposition to Korea's involvement did not significantly diminish a

²⁸ Derek Mitchell, "Does Popular Sentiment Matter? What's at Stake?" in Derek Mitchell, ed., *Strategy and Sentiment: South Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.-ROK Alliance*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2004, p. 9.

²⁹ *Yonhap News*, October 8, 2003.

³⁰ Gallup Korea, "Report on the Public Opinion on the War in Iraq," March 20, 2003. The Gallup Korea survey in November-December 2001 on the "future leaders of Korea" showed that this general public opinion was not a deviation from the consensus among political elites. The levels of possible support South Korea might provide "in what President Bush calls a war on terrorism," "76% "give limited support, but do

few months after the actual outbreak of the war. In an opinion poll conducted in September 2003, opinions against dispatching Korean troops far outweighed the opinions in favor (56.1% vs. 35.5%).³¹

In addition to such general aversion to the Iraq war, the political events in early 2003 further complicated the decision to dispatch troops. The landslide victory of the ruling Uri party and the advancement of Korean Democratic Labor Party (KDLP) in the 17th National Assembly election in April 2003 provided huge momentum for progressive civic activist groups and liberal National Assembly members. Moreover, in June, Kim Sun-il, a Korean who worked for a trading company in Iraq, was captured and beheaded by an Islamic militant group. Even before Kim's capture and death, coalitions of more than three hundred civic organizations launched a series of protests and candlelight vigils to force the government to reconsider its decision to send troops. About 20 members from both ruling and opposition parties, mostly elected for their first term, initiated collective action in collaboration with the civic organizations to block the passage of the troop deployment bill. The Roh government had justified the decision to send troops mainly on the ground that it was indispensable to preventing the US government from transferring part of the USFK to Iraq. Given the U.S. decision to go ahead with the plan prior to the Korean government's decision, the opposition groups argued that renegeing on the promise to send troops to Iraq could be a rightful *quid pro quo*.

However, collective action against the troop dispatch was never strong enough to produce political impacts comparable to the massive demonstrations in December 2002. During the first half of 2004, the most controversial issue was the ratification of the free trade agreement between South Korea and Chile, *not* the troop dispatch. The National Assembly passed the troop dispatch bill before that of the Korea-Chile free trade agreement (FTA); the process of voting to ratify the latter bill was postponed three times in less than a month. While the anti-Iraq war rally organized by activist groups drew only about 1,500 participants, a crowd about ten times larger gathered for the anti-FTA rally which was organized by the farmers' coalition. Moreover, while the FTA agenda caused major defections by ruling party members against the government's preference for an immediate ratification, the troop dispatch issue did not. In the general meeting held on June 17, the day after President Roh met its leaders, the ruling Uri party confirmed that it would be the party's official position to support the government decision to proceed with the troop dispatch plan as scheduled.³²

What was even more surprising than the conclusion of the two sensitive issues—U.S. troop reduction and the dispatch of Korean troops in Iraq—was that neither of the cases was converted into a violent anti-American movement. At no point during the entire period of negotiations for relocating and reducing the USFK, did the revision of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) emerge as a critical issue. The absence of the SOFA discourse is a remarkable turnaround, considering that an opinion survey conducted at the

not include military involvement" and 9% give no support. William Watts, "Next Generation Leaders in the Republic of Korea: Opinion Survey Report and Analysis," Potomac Associates, May 2002, p. 15.

³¹ *JoongAng Ilbo*, September 16, 2003.

³² *JoongAng Ilbo*, June 17, 2004.

peak of the anti-American movement in 2002-03 revealed that 96.2% of South Koreans believed that SOFA should be rewritten or revised.³³ Besides, the public reaction to the events was largely measured, devoid of a wild sense of betrayal by the U.S. and panic over national security. There emerged a general consensus among academics, officials, and civic activists, who reflected a wide spectrum of different ideological and policy perspectives on the security alliance between South Korea and the United States, that it was best to understand the inevitability and positive benefits of restructuring the alliance system. Phrases like “continu(ing) to reduce the American footprint on the peninsula,”³⁴ “more distance in the alliance,”³⁵ “practice of distancing (遠美, *won-mi*)”³⁶ were not interpreted as severance of ties, abandonment, or resentment. In fact, according to the 2004 foreign policy survey by the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 60% of South Koreans think that lowering U.S. troop levels in Korea would be good (11% very, 49% somewhat) for Korea, while 40% express concerns (6% very, 34% somewhat).³⁷

It is also quite miraculous that the hostage/execution incident in Iraq did not galvanize public opinion in South Korea to place blame and responsibility for the tragedy on “imperialist America.” Nor did it lead to the forging of a strong consensus for an immediate withdrawal from the U.S.-led campaign. Instead of accusation and blame, the South Korean public mostly approached the unfortunate incident from the perspective of human rights violations and anti-terrorism. For instance, when the progressive *Joengyojo* (Korean Teachers’ Union, KTU) announced its plan to mourn the death of Kim, it explained that the week-long extra-curricular activities would mainly involve anti-war/peace-loving education. As for the main themes, these activities were designed to provide young students with opportunities to be reminded that peace is a universal value and that violence would only breed more violence.³⁸ In cyberspace, internet users engaged in a series of heated debates among themselves about whether their country should contribute more actively to anti-terrorist campaigns after this personal tragedy. On balance, grievance over the loss of life and a condemnation of violence, rather than blame and spiteful fault-finding dominated the collective psychology of the Korean public.

These are certainly positive developments in the U.S.-Korea relationship. However, if we juxtapose what happened in 2002 and in 2004, these changes are perplexing anomalies. It should be recalled that almost everyone who wrote about the anti-American sentiment in Korea said that there had been a series of events leading to the actual spike in late 2002. There was no shortage of writings on the wall: Bush condemned North Korea as one of “the axis of evil”, Anton Ohno walked away with the gold medal at the short track final race of the winter Olympic games, Jay Leno mocked the disqualified

³³ Lee and Jung, p. 62.

³⁴ Balbina Y. Hwang, “Defusing Anti-American Rhetoric in South Korea,” *The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder*, no. 1619, January 234, 2003, pp.1-5.

³⁵ C.S. Eliot Kang, “Restructuring the U.S.-South Korean Alliance to Deal with the Second Korean Nuclear Crisis,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 57, 2, 309-324.

³⁶ Sang-il Kim, interview with *JoongAng Ilbo*, May 31, 2004.

³⁷ The Chicago Council of Foreign Relations, “Global Views 2004: South Korean Public Topline Report,” September 2004, p. 13.

³⁸ *DongA Ilbo*, June 29, 2004.

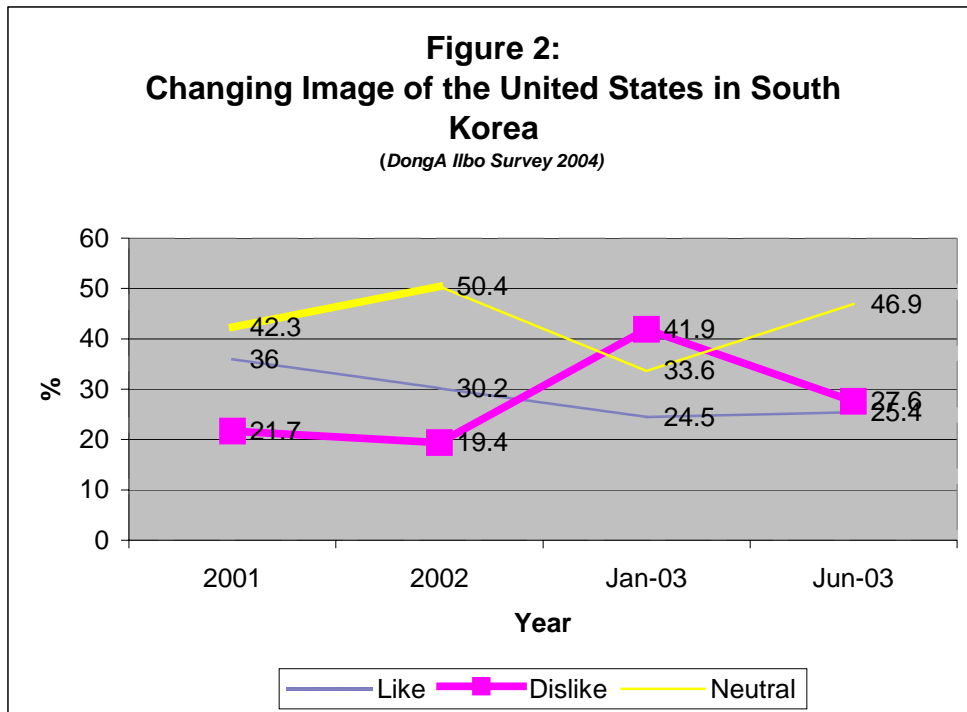
Korean skater, joking that he was so angry that he ate his dog, and the two U.S. soldiers who had been charged for the deaths of Mi-sun and Hyo-soon received a not-guilty verdict by the US military court.³⁹

How about 2004? The Bush administration launched a war on Iraq without the endorsement of the United Nations. The war was soon followed by the scandal of abuses at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Again at the Olympics, Paul Hamm, an American gymnast, edged ahead of two Korean gymnasts and won the gold medal in the individual Men's All-Around because three judges had failed to award a Korean the correct points (based on the degree of difficulty) for his routine. Then, the President of Harvard University mistakenly said that "over a million girls in Seoul during the 1970s were prostitutes."⁴⁰ And famous talk show host Oprah Winfrey made disparaging comments about Korean women for their "obsession with plastic surgery."⁴¹ In real-life politics, President Bush praised and thanked Japan for its support in the Iraq war in both his acceptance speech at the Republican convention and at the first presidential debate, but made no mention of South Korea's contributions. And both presidential candidates affirmed that in dealing with North Korea, a policy of preemption would not be off the table. In short, if one compares the litany of small and big events, the general atmosphere between South Korea and the United States in 2004 was not markedly better than two years ago. As a matter of fact, cumulative public poll data indicates that the image of the United States in South Korea, which nosedived in late 2002, has returned to the pre-2002 level (see Figure 2).

³⁹ Ah-Young Kim, "Old Wavers or a New Surge? Anti-Americanism from a South Korean Perspective," Pacific Forum CSIS Report, 2003, 8-14

⁴⁰ <http://news.kbs.co.kr/isppecial/ps00204.php?id=512> (Access date: October 12, 2004).

⁴¹ *Chosun Ilbo* (English edition), "Oprah Winfrey's Negative Remarks about Korean Women Spark Storm," October 15, 2004.



What accounts for this recovery? Why then has there been no outburst of anger towards the United States recently? Where has all the anti-American population gone? After all, a period of two years is not long enough for either a generational change to happen or for a certain age group to reverse its orientation to key political issues. As for anti-Americanism, the passage of time has only augmented the voice of the age groups who are more critical of the United States, since the conservative and pro-American older generations are mostly retired or deceased. One could suggest that both governments took measures that successfully prevented mutually sensitive issues from developing into full-fledged anti-Americanism. Although it is quite plausible that the governments might have learned a lesson or two from what they had experienced two years ago, there is no strong evidence that they actually made conscious and coordinated efforts not to repeat past mistakes. Although many pundits and specialists on U.S.-Korea relations had suggested that it was essential for both leaderships to celebrate the solidarity of the alliance in a rather explicit and embellished manner. According to them, this could abate the escalating tensions and antagonistic feelings fostered by aggressive media and public relations campaigns to educate both countries' citizens on the facts and the role of the SOFA, aggressive public diplomacy towards civic organizations and elaborate celebration of the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Mutual Security Treaty. But these suggestions were not seriously implemented.⁴² In short, within a period of two years, anti-American rhetoric in South Korea dissipated regardless of political interventions.

⁴² For policy suggestions to increase diversity in bilateral dialogue, see Katharine H.S. Moon, "South Korean Civil Society and Alliance Politics," in Derek Mitchell, ed., *Strategy and Sentiment: South*

The phenomenon of the “missing anti-Americanism” in South Korea leads us to rethink what we thought we knew but in fact did not about Korean anti-Americanism, and to reassess what now seems to be known unknowns. For starters, anti-Americanism is a misnomer, a term which clouds rather than clarifies our understanding of what has happened in the domestic politics of Korea and its relationship with the U.S. Uncritical usage of the term easily creates perceptions of an anti-American movement in South Korea as something unprecedented, unfounded, unpredictable, and dangerous. This perception has promoted frustration, a sense of hurt and anger among the Korean people on the one hand and between Koreans and American observers on the other hand. This has allowed analysts and policymakers to divert their attention from understanding the substantive characteristics of anti-Americanism in Korea and its complex nature. As William Watts observes, what the United States has observed may be more accurately characterized as a decline in *pro*-Americanism, rather than as a rise of anti-Americanism.⁴³

Moreover, we need to remember that anti-Americanism is a multi-faceted phenomenon. One consensus among researchers on anti-Americanism in South Korea is that anti-Americanism means many things to many people, defying a clean-cut definition.⁴⁴ Its definitions range from “critical views of the United States held by Koreans, including perceptions of U.S. policies and the behavior of individual Americans, especially those in uniform,”⁴⁵ to “any hostile action or expression toward the United States, its government, domestic institutions, foreign policies, prevailing values, culture, and people,”⁴⁶ to simply “an increase in criticisms of, and dissatisfaction with U.S. policies” or “South Koreans’ antipathy towards America.”⁴⁷

The multiple definitions of anti-Americanism do not necessarily imply confusion among its observers. Rather, it casts doubts about regarding anti-Americanism as a monolithic concept. Anti-Americanism is a phenomenon and a trend, the analysis of which should be made in a particular historical context and an issue area. Chung-in Moon⁴⁸ and Chaibong Hahm⁴⁹ caution that it is important to make distinctions between the different layers of anti-Americanism. For example, anti-Americanism as a collective grievance towards the political entity of the United States is not fixed, but tends to fluctuate with changes in Korean domestic politics and US foreign policy. In contrast, South Koreans as a whole have tended to embrace the universal values embodied in the

Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.-ROK Alliance, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2004, 56-8.

⁴³ William Watts, 13.

⁴⁴ Jinwung Kim, “The Nature of South Korean Anti-Americanism,” *Korea Journal*, Spring 1994, p. 41.

⁴⁵ Katharine H.S. Moon, “Korean Democracy, NGO Activism, and Anti-Americanism (mimeo),” IFANS Seminar, May 17-8, 2002, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Jinwung Kim, p. 37.

⁴⁷ Balbina Y. Hwang, “The Implications of Anti-Americanism in Korea for the Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance,” *Korea Observer*, vol. 34, no. 1, Spring 2003, 41.

⁴⁸ Chung-in Moon, “Between Banmi and Sungmi: Changing Images of the United States in South Korea,” unpublished manuscript, 2003, p. 12.

⁴⁹ Chaibong Hahm, “Sadewa Banmi Saiaseseo (Between worshipping the great and Anti-Americanism,” *Quarterly Sasang*, Winter 2000, pp. 52-68.

American culture and system. The sporadic, inconsistent, and ambivalent manifestations of anti-American sentiment in Korea primarily result from the dynamic shift in the balance between these different strands: historical grievances, domestic politics, U.S. foreign policy and transnational values and norms.

Making sense of South Korea's ever-changing and complex sentiment towards the United States must be especially challenging for the United States, that has become so accustomed to the cold war way of thinking. Victor Cha and David Kang highlight the irony of the long success of American military engagement with South Korea. They argue that, because the United States was so deeply accustomed to having South Korea as an obedient and dutiful ally throughout the cold war, it has failed to remember that anti-communist, conservative and dependent South Korea as it existed during the cold war might be more of "an aberration than the rule."⁵⁰ Hence, the sudden arrival of a vocal, independent, and democratic South Korea that refuses to manage the alliance according to American preferences and rules came as a total shock to US policymakers and public.

What is needed today is for the United States to make an effort to maintain a sound working relationship with Korea despite the absence of the old premium it has enjoyed since the Korean War and the Cold war. With the rapidly growing civic participation in domestic politics since the inauguration of the first civilian government in 1992, especially in the areas of national security policymaking, and rising national pride and confidence fed by economic development, post-cold war South Korea has increasingly refused to continue to tolerate American heavy handedness and the asymmetric structure of the security partnership. In the United States, the predominant response to such a different South Korea has largely been emotional bitterness and a grudge over the "breach of faith" and ungratefulness. Such emotional reactions in the United States stem from unrealistic expectations of a "feeling of genuine warmth towards the U.S."⁵¹ The image of America as a savior continued to dominate the national psyche of Koreans more than half a century after the end of the Korean War, and the military alliance forged in the aftermath of the Korean War fifty years ago should continue to operate without major restructuring. A vibrant, young, and democratic Korea is not an easy reality, but a reality to start with nonetheless.

IV. Conclusion

Although [people in their twenties and thirties] do not yet form the core of the new South Korean leadership, the policies of the Roh Moo-hyun government reflect the opinions and views expressed by the younger generation. This slant is an anomaly, given the South Korean government's traditional conservatism. Being conservative in South Korea is roughly defined as being anti-Communist and fundamentally favorable toward the United States. The elite establishment in South Korea, which would include those in the government, politics, major corporations, the military,

⁵⁰ Victor Cha and David Kang, Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies, New York: Columbia University Press, 2003, p. 171.

⁵¹ Tim Shorrock, "The Struggle for Democracy in South Korea in the 1980s and the Rise of Anti-Americanism," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1986, pp. 1198-1199.

religious groups, the mass media, and academia, has by and large been considered conservative (with the exception of those in academia). Since the advent of the Roh Moo-hyun administration, things have changed. What is seen as the convergence of the perspective of the younger generation and the policy orientation of the government underscores a revolutionary change in the makeup of South Korean society, especially the elite ranks.⁵²

The preceding quote aptly captures the concern over the generation gap in South Korean politics today. On the one hand, the youth represent the rise of progressive or left-leaning politics, and it threatens to dislodge the political establishment that has been in power. Young people who are politically active and former dissident activists who dominate the Blue House are referred to pejoratively as *ppalgaeng-i* (“reds,” “commies”). On the other hand, progressives tend to pigeonhole conservatives as well, excoriating them for corruption, elitism, and dependency (on big powers). Each fears that the other is misguided and ruining the nation. This Manichean tendency is the most regrettable consequence of the rapid democratization of South Korea. But, it also reveals the reality of the ongoing transitional *malaise* and resentment accompanying the structural upheavals in political ideology, generation, class identity, regional and international competition, and related factors, in contemporary Korean society.

The collective expressions of anti-American feelings reflect tumultuous new political dynamics in South Korea. Yet, the task before policymakers and academics is to look through the great confusion and contractions in the political scene, and think of its nature and consequences. In this paper, I agree that there have been generational transitions underlying the anti-American movement, but argue that the connection between youth and the danger of anti-Americanism is underspecified and largely under-explained. Apocalyptic forecasts so popular only two years ago seems misplaced and awry in the face of placid but gainful interactions between the two allies today.

In order to maintain and renew their working relationship, both sides of the Pacific first need to escape from old inertia, and admit beyond mere rhetoric concessions that the context of the bilateral relationship as well as the domestic politics of both countries has truly changed. There is no doubt that civic activism in addressing and protesting against US military presence will continue. Yet these political movements will tend increasingly toward “lawfulness” in procedure and moderation with pragmatism in goals. In the long run, democratic consolidation is likely to have a stabilizing effect on feelings of anti-Americanism in youth, and lead to its’ pragmatic manifestations.

⁵² Jung-hoon Lee, “The Emergence of ‘New Elites’ in South Korea and its Implications for Popular Sentiment Toward the United States” in *Strategy and Sentiment: South Korean Views of the United States and the U.S.- ROK Alliance*, Derek J. Mitchell, ed. (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004), p. 61.