

Gwangju and South Jeolla International Magazine

GWANGJU News

May 2025 #279

Remembering May



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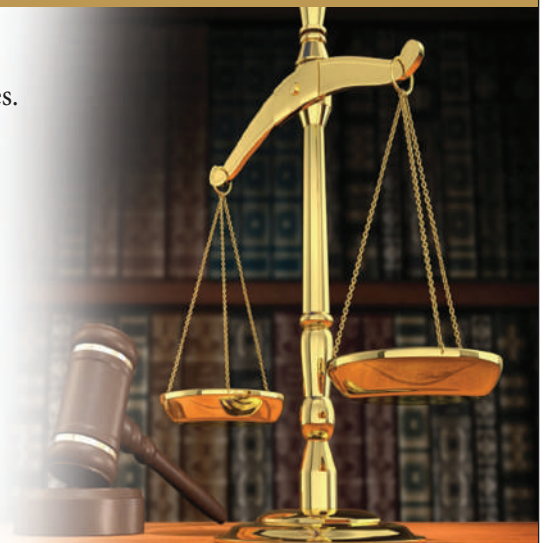
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National Liberation Movement mural, WHRCF Human Rights Tour 2024.

Photo courtesy of the **World Human Rights Cities Forum Secretariat**.

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From the Editor



Last month, this space began with “April showers bring May flowers.” This month, blossoms and flowers are everywhere, bringing the joy of spring out of the drabness of winter. Beautiful as they may be, May flowers in Gwangju do not always bring joy. Numerous May blooms are intended as memorial flowers – in remembrance of those who were lost in the Gwangju Uprising of May 1980.

The mere utterance of “May” brings back haunting memories to those who resided in Gwangju during the uprising, those who witnessed the unrest, those who were wounded and traumatized, those who were family, friends, and relatives of those who lost their lives during those ten bloody days of the Gwangju Uprising. Many of the memorial flowers will be placed on the graves of the 764 victims of “May” who are interred in the May 18th National Cemetery on the outskirts of Gwangju.

Accordingly, this May issue of the *Gwangju News* brings to our readers articles related to the Gwangju Uprising, more formally known as the May 18 Democratization Movement. Our first feature is on “5-18” (oh-il-pal), as the uprising is commonly referred to. This is followed by an article on the recent martial law crisis and how its outcome has been influenced by 5.18 and the democratization that has followed.

On this 45th anniversary of 5.18, we bring you an article on the “May Mothers” of Gwangju, an organization of women related to the Gwangju Uprising, who have been unrelentingly fighting for the truth about the uprising and for democracy in Korea. We also bring you a walk down Democracy Road, a network of paths on the campus of Chonnam National University commemorating 5.18 and the university’s involvement.

This May, Gwangju hosts the World Human Rights Cities Forum, which was founded in 2011 “to carry forward the legacy of the May 18 Democratization Movement.” Our Forum article introduces the institution and this year’s three-day Forum events. One of the main speakers at the May 15–17 Forum is Prof. Suh Sung, once imprisoned for his pro-democracy activism and a lifetime advocate for human rights. Our publisher was fortunate to conduct an interview with Prof. Suh, which we also present in this issue.

We have much more to bring you: Teachers Day, Dano Day, Together Day. Rock-face carvings to commemorate Buddha’s Birthday, Gokseong flowers, Mokpo *jjimjil-bang*, a book review, area sports, and upcoming events. Enjoy!

David E. Shaffer
 Editor-in-Chief
 Gwangju News





The Rose Garden on the Chosun University campus in downtown Gwangju.

Blooming Harmony

This photo captures a quiet moment in a garden where nature blooms without rush. Rows of roses in soft yellow, blush pink, and deep crimson fill the frame, their petals open wide beneath a clear spring sky. It's a peaceful reminder of how beauty often waits quietly, inviting us to slow down and simply notice.

The Photographer



Anh Nguyen (Anne) has a love for capturing everyday beauty. She enjoys photographing seasonal landscapes and sharing stories through visuals. Her work highlights local charm, colorful details, and warm, candid moments.

May 2025

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Gwangju City News



Televised announcement of President Yoon's dismissal by the Constitutional Court. (MBC News)

President of South Korea Impeached

At 11:22 a.m. on April 4, 2025, the Constitutional Court of Korea announced that President Yoon Suk Yeol was removed from office. Acting Chief Justice Moon Hyung-bae said, "President Yoon Suk Yeol is dismissed," and explained that all eight judges agreed on the decision.

President Yoon was elected as the 20th president and started his term on May 10, 2022. During his time in office, he caused many problems. The biggest issue happened on December 3, 2024, when he declared martial law. This shocked many people in Gwangju, because it reminded them of what had happened in May 1980, when former President Chun Doo-hwan also declared martial law in Gwangju.

The National Assembly said that President Yoon's actions were illegal and against the Korean Constitution, so they submitted an impeachment request on December 14, 2024. For about four months, there were many protests across the country. Some people supported the impeachment, but others did not. In Gwangju, a protest defending the legitimacy of martial law and opposing the impeachment was held in March 2025, leading to tension among local residents.

After long consideration, the Constitutional Court finally made their decision. All eight judges

agreed to remove the president. Many people in Gwangju were happy about this, remembering the spirit of May 1980. This situation also reminded many people of the 2016 impeachment of former President Park Geun-hye. At that time, Korea showed the world how strong its democracy is through peaceful candlelight protests.

This recent decision also shows that democracy and justice are still alive in Korea, even when democracy is in danger in other parts of the world. Because of this ruling, the next presidential election will be held on June 3, 2025. Political parties are now getting ready to choose their presidential candidates and prepare for the election.

World Human Rights Cities Forum Opens in Gwangju

The World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF) is an international event held every year in Gwangju since 2011. This forum was started to help cities become places where human rights are respected and protected.

Through the forum, Gwangju shares the spirit of the May 1980 pro-democracy movement with the world. At that time, even in the face of violent government action, the people of Gwangju stood firm and fought together against injustice. Now, Gwangju works to pass on this spirit as a shared human rights value with global citizens.

The forum has grown into a global space for human rights exchange. People from human rights cities, groups, and organizations come together to share ideas and work together. Their goal is to protect human rights in everyday life and make sure those rights are supported by official systems.

This year, the event will be held May 15–17 (Thu.–Sat.), at the Kim Daejung Convention Center.

The theme for this year is “Peace and Solidarity: Human Rights Cities Against War and Violence.”

In Gwangju, the month of May is very special. It is a time to remember the spirit of the people, the Spirit of May, and the beauty of spring. We look forward to feeling this spirit through many events, especially the World Human Rights Cities Forum.

Upcoming Gwangju “Together Day” Event

The “Together Day” event hosted by Gwangju Metropolitan City will be held on Saturday, May 24, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Gwangju City Hall. Together Day was made a national commemorative day in 2007 to encourage understanding and harmony among people of different races and cultures. It promotes the idea of living together in a multicultural society.

The event will be joined by the mayor of Gwangju, local politicians, foreign workers, international students, multicultural families, and local citizens. In 2024, the event featured cultural booths and food from 15 countries, including Canada, Ethiopia, and Romania. Visitors enjoyed global food experiences, cultural performances, and learned about cultural diversity.

This year as well, people from many countries will prepare booths where visitors can experience world cultures. There will also be support services for foreigners. The event is expected to be a global festival for both Korean and non-Korean residents living in Gwangju.

Wildfire in Gyeongsangbuk-do Finally Extinguished

The massive wildfire that began in Uiseong, Gyeongsangbuk-do, on March 22, 2025, and spread to four nearby cities and counties, has finally been put out after burning for 149 hours. This wildfire is expected to be recorded as the

largest in South Korea’s history, with 24 people killed and damage covering 45,157 hectares of land. The fire started on March 22 at 11:24 a.m. in a mountain area of Anpyeong-myeon, Uiseong-gun, and spread to Yeongdeok, Andong, Cheongsong, and Yeongyang. As of March 28, the main fires in all areas were successfully extinguished.

The Korea Forest Service said that strong winds made it hard to control the fire. Wind speeds reached up to 27 meters per second, and the weather was hot and dry, which allowed the fire to spread quickly. Also, smoke mixed with fog made it difficult for firefighting helicopters to operate.

After the main fire was put out on March 28, cleanup and recovery work has been going on since the 30th. Many famous people and citizens in Korea are donating money to help the victims and support recovery efforts.

This wildfire reminds us that spring is the season to be very careful about fires. On March 29, the city of Gwangju held a joint campaign at Mudeungsan National Park to prevent large spring wildfires. Since many wildfires are caused by human mistakes, such as careless burning or illegal trash fires, Gwangju citizens are also asked to be very cautious.

9 of 10 International Students Want to Work in Korea

A recent survey shows that 9 out of 10 international students studying at Korean universities hope to find a job in Korea after graduation. On March 26, the Korea Federation of SMEs announced the results of a survey titled “Career Plans of International Students After Graduation,” conducted with 805 international students currently studying in Korea.

According to the survey, 86.5% of respondents said they want to get a job in Korea after graduating. Among students in associate degree

programs, the number was even higher: 90.8% said they wish to stay and work in Korea.

The top reasons for wanting to work in Korea include the following: (a) wanting to continue living in Korea (35.2%), (b) higher salary compared to their home country (27.7%), and (c) interest in working in a specific field (25.6%). To work in Korea after graduation, international students need to get an E-7 visa (special activity visa). However, 66.7% of the respondents said that getting the E-7 visa is very difficult.

Currently, the E-9 visa (non-professional employment) is not available to those on a student visa (D-2) or job-seeking visa (D-10). But if it were allowed, 58.8% of international students said they would be willing to take E-9 jobs, such as working in manufacturing or small businesses.

Lim Myung-ro, head of the labor policy division at the Korea Federation of SMEs, said, “Many international students are highly motivated to work in Korea, but because the E-7 visa is hard to get, their chances are limited. We need to carefully consider allowing international students to apply for the E-9 visa.”

Meanwhile, a proposed law to allow international students to apply for the E-9 visa – called the Partial Amendment to the Act on Employment of Foreign Workers – was submitted to the National Assembly in November 2024, but it is still under review.

each station. However, neighborhood buses and rural buses in Jeollanam-do are not included in this free service.

On this day, Bus No. 518, which goes to the May 18th National Cemetery, will run 30 more times than usual. These additional services and the free fare policy are expected to make it easier for citizens to visit historical sites related to the May 1980 movement.

To prepare for the May 18 Eve Festival and other events, the section of road from Geumnam-ro 1-ga to 3-ga (from May 18 Democracy Square to Geumnam-ro Park) will be closed until 3 a.m. on May 19. Due to the road closure, 19 city bus routes that usually pass in front of May 18 Democracy Square will make a detour at the Geumnam-ro 4-ga intersection.

Meanwhile, on April 7, a proposed amendment to the Gwangju Ordinance on Honoring the May 18 Spirit, led by Council Member Lee Myung-no, was passed by the City Council. As this year marks the 45th anniversary of the May 18 Democratic Movement, the amendment made it possible to provide free public transportation also on May 17, the day before the May 18 observances. As a result, Gwangju citizens will enjoy free city bus and subway rides for two days – May 17 and 18.

Compiled by **Kim Jinyoung**.

Free City Bus and Subway Rides on May 18

To commemorate the May 18 Democratic Movement, all city bus and subway rides in Gwangju will be free for one day on Sunday, May 18. When using the Gwangju subway, tapping a transportation card at the gate will result in a 0 won fare. Those who do not use a card can receive a free ride pass at the customer service center at



광주광역시
GWANGJU CITY

5·18

More Than Just A Number

By **Julienne Mei Magbanua**

It was in high school when I saw the movie *A Taxi Driver*. It was about a taxi driver who drove a German reporter to Gwangju to reveal what was happening in the city amidst the uprising against continued military rule. I became curious about it, and when I applied to be an exchange student, I selected Chonnam National University as my host university because it is located in Gwangju. Later on, I found out that the university itself played a significant role in the uprising. Students of this university were the ones who initiated this movement.

I arrived in Gwangju on August 28, 2024. As my buddy and I were heading to the dorm, I saw a mural of the Gwangju Uprising on one of the walls on campus. It felt surreal to finally see it in person. “Do you know *o-il-pal*?” my buddy

asked. I was confused about what that meant but then realized that those were the numbers five, one, and eight (5.18 / May 18), for the date of the Gwangju Uprising. Little did I know that I would hear these words quite often throughout my stay in Gwangju, and that this number holds greater significance than one might think.

I was enrolled in a course titled “May 18 Democratic Movement and Other Protests Around the World.” This class gave us a wider understanding of the Gwangju Uprising by starting with early Korean history so that we could better grasp the decision of the people of Gwangju to push through with the protests against martial law in 1980, despite other cities backing down. South Korea’s history of colonization and extensive military rule



Julienne at the May 18 Memorial Park.

played a key role in Gwangju citizens' desire for democratization. Even with the violent force from the military's special forces, Gwangju citizens fought as much as their breath would allow in order to secure what they had long desired – true freedom.

I had the opportunity to visit some sites that would help me better internalize what happened during this movement. Professor Kim Young-Im of UNESCO KONA invited me to join a tour to commemorate the selection of Han Kang, South Korea's first Nobel Prize in Literature winner.

Her works feature the country's traumatic political history and one of her greatly celebrated works is *Human Acts*. On the tour, we went to different sites of the May 18 Movement. One of the locations that really left a painful mark was the former site of the 505 Security Forces, where protesters used to be held captive. We went inside and down to the basement where interrogations used to be conducted. There was a waiting room that seemed like a death sentence in itself. It was cold and dark. The rays of sunlight barely passed through the little window – somewhat like a symbol of hope that was growing dim. Thin were the walls. A person who got caught and imprisoned back in the day would have heard the cries of those who were being severely beaten and tortured. It would have been terrifying to know that you're going to be next. The tour guide also mentioned that some prisoners would be told to run lapses with sand in their mouths until they passed out. It was truly a brutal time and nothing could justify the violence that took place during that period of military dictatorship. Standing in that room gave me a glimpse of the horrors of the past and made me appreciate even more the works of the people who are keeping the memory of the democratic struggle alive.

Through the initiative of the May 18 Institute of Chonnam National University in partnership with Gwangju Metropolitan City, I was able to visit the May 18th National Cemetery and pay my respects to those who gave their lives in the fight for democracy.



May 18 Memorial Park.

I will never forget one interaction I had with a lady who lived through the time of the uprising. When she found out that I was greatly interested in the Gwangju Uprising, she said that she was touched that a foreigner like me would delve into learning more about their painful history. She said that the event is very precious to the people of Gwangju and that someone from a different country wanting to know more about it made her immensely grateful. Everyone I met in Gwangju, upon learning that I was doing research on the said movement, always greeted me with such warmth and enthusiasm, and were willing to go to lengths to help me find more resources. They want the story to continue to spread so that it will not be forgotten.

To remember means to place great value on the sacrifice of the people who fought for justice and democracy. To remember means to let their legacy live on. To remember means to protect what was once denied. To remember means to prevent history from repeating itself.

On December 3, 2024, news of martial law came out. It was unexpected. I thought to myself that it was such an interesting time to be in South Korea, specifically in Gwangju, and even more specifically at Chonnam National University. I remember professors saying things like “In 2024, really?” The last time martial law was declared, or at least extended, was back in May 1980, just hours before the Gwangju Uprising erupted. They couldn’t believe that such a thing was happening again. One of my professors even decided to cancel class just to be safe. Martial law is quite a sensitive topic and the fairly recent declaration triggered a memory of the “national trauma.” The people of South Korea have learned from their past and are keeping the memory of the Gwangju Uprising alive in their hearts and in their daily lives. The recent impeachment of the president who threatened the people with martial law signifies that the country’s democratic framework is working effectively and that the legacy of the democratic movement persists.

Power is with the people – not just a select few.

It never fails to amaze me that what started as a student movement sparked an outcry that changed South Korean politics and people’s perception of power and leadership. However, it cannot be denied that there are still some who refuse to believe the truth of the Gwangju Uprising and choose to defend the brutality that took place. Even so, as someone once told me, the fact that people continue to have different opinions on the uprising means that it remains relevant in South Korean society today.

After spending months in South Korea, I couldn’t help but feel deeply connected to the people of Gwangju. They stood firm in their belief and catalyzed positive change in the country. Time has passed by and remnants of the Gwangju Uprising are left – in the form of books, buildings, and the number 5·18.

5·18 is more than just a date – more than just a number.

More than just a number.



Exhibit at the Jeonil Building 245.

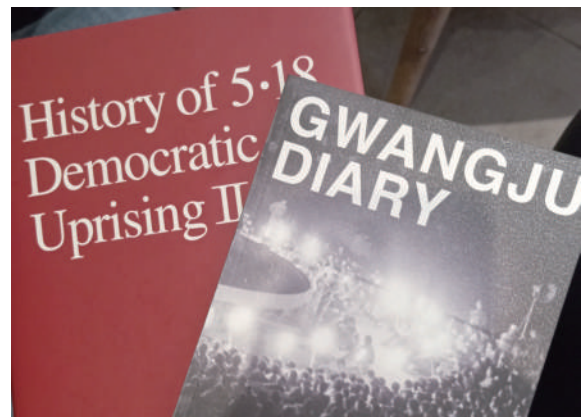


Exhibit at the Jeonil Building 245.

As South Korea navigates the uncertainty of the current political situation, may the people always remember what was fought for and why it was fought for. May the people always remember 5.18 and the heaviness it holds. May the legacy of the Gwangju Uprising live on! 🇰🇷

Photographs by **Julienne Mei Magbanua**.

The Author



Julienne Mei Magbanua was an exchange student at Chonnam National University majoring in political science. She is a Christian and her main goal is to reflect God’s light to the world in everything that she does. One of the ways in which she shares this is through music. As a singer-songwriter, she aims to bring hope to her listeners through the music she creates. Instagram: @_teresa.music

Martial Law Crisis in South Korea

“Does the Past Help the Present?”

By Shin Gyonggu

In December 2024, as South Korea faced a political crisis with the declaration of martial law by President Yoon Seok Yeol, the nation was confronted with a fundamental question posed by Han Kang, the recent Nobel Prize-winning author: “Can the past help the present? Can the dead save the living?” Han Kang, whose literary work has long explored the trauma and legacy of South Korea’s turbulent modern history, particularly the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, found her question answered in real time. The people’s resistance to the president’s attempted self-coup on December 3, 2024, offered living testament to the enduring power of historical memory and civic courage.

This article examines the martial law crisis of 2024, the mechanisms behind the attempted coup, the extraordinary civic and institutional response, and how the lessons and memories of the past – especially the Gwangju Uprising – shaped the outcome. Ultimately, it asks: Does the past help the present?

The Anatomy of a Crisis: Coup Preparation and Execution

South Korea, renowned for its robust democracy, was stunned when Yoon declared martial law in a televised address on December 3, 2024. Citing alleged “anti-state activities” by the opposition Democratic Party, Yoon suspended political activities, banned gatherings, and ordered the arrest of political opponents. The National Assembly building was surrounded by police and elite military units.

Yet, as shocking as the declaration was, history

shows that self-coups – where a sitting leader uses emergency powers to override democratic institutions – rarely fail. Globally, such coups have a high success rate, with some studies suggesting up to 93 percent succeed, especially when military and police forces are thoroughly prepared and loyal. In this case, Yoon’s administration had meticulously planned for months: Loyalists were installed in key military and intelligence posts, special forces were mobilized, and lists of political opponents to be detained were prepared. The operation included (a) deployment of 500 police officers to surround the National Assembly building, (b) mobilization of elite military units, including the Special Mission Group and airborne brigades, (c) plans to seize the National Election Commission and detain opposition leaders, and (d) emergency budget allocations and logistical preparations for mass detentions.

The Shadow of Gwangju

The martial law declaration was not without precedent. In May 1980, the military regime of Chun Doo-hwan brutally suppressed the Gwangju Uprising, killing and injuring hundreds of pro-democracy protesters. The trauma of Gwangju has haunted Korean society for decades, serving as both a warning and a rallying cry against authoritarianism. Han Kang’s novel *Human Acts* brought this history to a global audience, portraying the pain and resilience of those who suffered under martial law.

Resistance and Reversal: How the Coup Failed

Institutional and Civic Resilience: Despite the thoroughness of the preparations, the coup



Demonstrating against Yoon. (MBC TV)

lasted only six hours. The sudden failure was due to a combination of institutional resilience and extraordinary civic action.

Swift Legislative Action: Within two hours of the declaration, 190 lawmakers – forewarned by internal networks and social media, especially by opposition leader Lee Jaemyeong – gathered at the National Assembly, risking arrest and violence. Despite military attempts to block their entry, they unanimously passed a resolution to annul martial law at 1:01 a.m. on December 4.

Military and Police Reluctance: Crucially, many military and police officers hesitated or outright refused to enforce orders. Some commanders delayed deployments, while others kept their units away from confrontation points. There were reports of soldiers learning of their mission only en route, and some expressed feelings of betrayal by their superiors. Lieutenant general Gwak Jonggeun evacuated his troupe from the Assembly without seeking the permission of his superiors immediately after the resolution. Colonel Jo Seonghyeon, commander of the 1st Security Group of the Capital Defense Command, stopped his unit from approaching the Assembly building. This show of insubordination may have definitely blocked the secondary coup attempt by Yoon.

Civic Mobilization: Ordinary citizens played a decisive role. Thousands gathered outside the

National Assembly, physically blocking armored vehicles and forming human shields. Social media and messaging platforms enabled rapid mobilization and coordination, with citizens bringing food, supplies, and even strollers to support the demonstrations. The atmosphere was tense yet marked by acts of solidarity and even humor – protesters waved satirical banners. Citizens and soldiers, pushing each other, did not violently confront each other. A man who served in the special forces, disclosing his military service, admonished the martial law soldiers to behave themselves properly for democracy. All these strange confrontations coordinated to de-escalate tensions, ultimately causing the coup to fail.

Citizen Support and Solidarity: The civic movement after the annulment of martial law continued in a deeply communal way. Millions of people gathered to request a ruling by the Constitutional Court upholding impeachment. Some young people staged a so-called “kisses demonstration,” an outdoor sit-in demonstration even during snowy, freezing nights.

Some citizens provided food, warm clothing, and financial support to those on the front lines. Some people mobilized heater buses as a brief shelter to warm the bodies of demonstrators. Some provided a babysitting bus. The demonstration was not only serious but also fun with witty posters and cheering light sticks and K-pop songs.

The protests were marked by a spirit of mutual aid and determination, with families, students, and elders participating side by side. The sense of shared purpose and historical continuity was palpable.

The Power of Memory: Why did so many people risk their safety to resist? The answer lies in the living memory of Gwangju and subsequent democratic struggles. Han Kang, observing from abroad, noted the difference between 1980 and 2024: “I saw people trying to stop armored vehicles with their bodies, restraining armed soldiers by hugging them with their bare hands, and standing ground though soldiers were approaching with guns. When the troops were retreating, I also saw some elderly citizens shouting ‘goodbye’ as if they were talking to their sons.” The trauma of past state violence had become a source of collective resolve. Citizens and soldiers alike remembered the cost of silence and inaction.

“The past is not merely a shadow; it is a guide...”

The Role of Civil Society and the Rule of Law: The opposition Democratic Party and civil society organizations had anticipated the possibility of martial law. Lawmakers with military and intelligence backgrounds used their networks to gather information and prepare contingency plans. When the crisis erupted, these preparations enabled rapid, coordinated action, demonstrating the importance of institutional memory and vigilance.

Legal and Political Aftermath: Once martial law was lifted, the National Assembly moved quickly to initiate impeachment proceedings against Yoon. The Constitutional Court launched investigations into the legality of the martial law declaration, and several top officials resigned in protest or disgrace. The episode reaffirmed the importance of the rule of law and the independence of democratic institutions.

The Past as a Guide and a Warning: The martial law crisis of 2024 was a defining moment for South Korean democracy. It demonstrated that the past does indeed help the present – not as a distant memory but as a living force that shapes collective action and moral judgment. The memory of the Gwangju Uprising, kept alive through literature, education, and commemoration, provided both a warning against complacency and a source of inspiration for resistance.

Han Kang’s question, “Can the past help the present? Can the dead save the living?” was answered in the affirmative by the actions of millions. The sacrifices of 1980 were not in vain; they became the foundation upon which a new generation stood to defend democracy. The resilience of South Korean institutions and the courage of its citizens offer a model for other societies facing democratic backsliding and authoritarian threats.

As the Nobel Committee observed, “In her oeuvre, Han Kang confronts historical traumas and in each of her works exposes the fragility of human life.... She has a unique awareness of the connections between body and soul, the living and the dead.” The events of December 2024 proved that these connections are not just literary metaphors but vital threads in the fabric of a resilient democracy.

The lesson is clear: The past is not merely a shadow; it is a guide, a warning, and most importantly, a source of hope and strength for the present. South Korea’s experience shows that democracy is never guaranteed, but with vigilance, memory, and courage, it can be defended – even against the odds. 🇰🇷

The Author



Shin Gyonggu has served the Gwangju International Center as its volunteer director for the past 26 years. He served as a professor for more than 30 years at Chonnam National University until his retirement in 2013. Dr. Shin is also the publisher of the *Gwangju News*.

Peace and Solidarity

Human Rights Cities Acting for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

By the WHRCF Secretariat

Gwangju Hosts WHRCF 2025

The 2025 World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF 2025) will be held on May 15 to 17 at the Kim Daejung Convention Center (KDJ Center) in Gwangju. Over the course of three days, the forum will present 27 sessions across seven categories, offering a global platform for dialogue, solidarity, and action.

Honoring the Spirit of May 18

Launched by Gwangju Metropolitan City in 2011, the WHRCF was founded to carry forward the legacy of the May 18 Democratization Movement and to foster a global network of human rights cities. Since then, the forum has evolved into a key international platform where cities, civil society, and human rights experts come together to exchange ideas and seek collective solutions to human rights challenges.

Beginning this year, the forum has moved its event scheduling from October to May to align with Gwangju's May 18 Democratization Commemorative Week. The 2025 theme is "Peace and Solidarity: Human Rights Cities Acting for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding." Participants will reflect on the meaning of active peace and explore strategies for building inclusive cities where all people can live in safety and dignity.

Forum Highlights

The WHRCF will open with a keynote address by Professor Suh Sung, followed by a plenary session in which local and international speakers



will engage in in-depth discussions on this year's theme of peace and solidarity.

Thematic Sessions

Seven thematic sessions will be held, focusing on:

- Children and Youth
- Dialogue to Promote a Global Anti-Violence Culture
- Disability
- Migration
- Social Economy
- Villages and Human Rights
- Women

Each session will discuss meaningful exchanges between experts and citizens on pressing human rights issues.



Opening ceremony of WHRCF 2024, congratulatory remarks by Nada Al-Nashif.

Special Sessions

The Human Rights Paper Session will spotlight cutting-edge research presented by scholars from around the world. Another key event, Cities Against Violence, will feature city representatives sharing their local experiences of resisting violence and promoting peace.

Human Rights Tour

Participants will have the opportunity to join the Human Rights Tour, which traces the footsteps of the May 18 Democratization Movement. The tour will visit key historical sites from May 1980, offering personal stories and moments of remembrance for those who sacrificed their lives for democracy.

Side Events

A variety of side events will enrich the WHRCF experience:

- Screenings of short films followed by conversations with the directors
- A special conversation with actor and author Cha In-pyo, known for his novel *Once We Look at the Same Star*
- A plant-based cooking class titled *Bring Peace to Your Table*

Pre-Registration

Pre-registration for WHRCF 2025 is open until May 11 on the forum website at www.whrcf.org. The website also provides detailed information on the full program schedule, session descriptions, concept notes, and participant guidelines. Onsite registration will be available for those who miss the pre-registration window.

The World Human Rights Cities Forum is open to all – join us in building a more peaceful and inclusive world. 🌍

Photographs courtesy of the WHRCF Secretariat.



Survivor of South Korea's Gulag

Interview with Suh Sung

By Shin Gyonggu



Suh Sung speaking at an event honoring minjung artist Hong Sungdam.

I first met Suh Sung nearly 20 years ago, expecting to encounter a man marked by anger and resolution after enduring nearly two decades of imprisonment and unbearable torture. He had even attempted self-immolation, which severely disfigured his face and body. However, my expectations were completely negated by his vibrant spirit and sharp sense of humor.

Professor Suh Sung (서승) is one of the main speakers at the 2025 World Human Rights Cities Forum (May 16–17) in Gwangju. Suh was born on April 3, 1945, in Kyoto, Japan, to Korean parents. He completed his early education in Japan and graduated from Tokyo University of Education in 1968. He later pursued graduate studies in sociology at Seoul National University

in South Korea. In 1971, Suh was arrested by South Korean authorities on suspicion of being a North Korean spy and spent 19 years in prison, enduring torture and harsh treatment before his release in 1990.

A tragic aspect of South Korea's history is that Suh's 19 years of imprisonment is overshadowed by the cases of 63 other long-serving prisoners of conscience. A South Korean holds the world record for the longest imprisonment. Mr. Kim Seonmyong, who refused to write a letter of ideological conversion, spent 42 years in prison until his release in 1995 under a special amnesty.

After his release in 1990, Suh became known for his advocacy for human rights and his academic work, specializing in contemporary Korean law and politics, human rights law in East Asia, and comparative human rights law. He served as a professor of law at the law department of Ritsumeikan University in Japan from 1998 to 2018 and was a research advisor at the Ritsumeikan Center for Korean Studies. Now Suh is endowed-chair professor at Woosuk University in Jeonju. He is also the author of numerous significant books on peacebuilding and human rights in East Asia, including the following:

- ***The Ufugazi of East Asia* (2016):** This travelogue and collection of essays is based on Suh's visits to sites of state violence and human rights violations across East Asia. The term Ufugazi, meaning "great wind" in Okinawan, reflects his activism for peace and human rights in the region. This book is available in both Korean and Japanese.
- ***Korea Toward Peace, Japan Toward Empire* (2019):** This work addresses Korea–Japan

relations and peace in East Asia, examining Japan's imperialist attitudes, discussing the necessity of overcoming colonial legacies, and reflecting on the prospects for a peaceful future in Korean society. It holds Japan accountable for its colonial rule and emphasizes the importance of international solidarity and the role of civil society in achieving peace and human rights in East Asia.

• ***Unbroken Spirits: Nineteen Years in South Korea's Gulag*** (2022): This memoir details Suh's experience as a political prisoner in South Korea, covering his arrest, imprisonment, and eventual release after 19 years. It provides a personal account of state violence, torture, and the struggle for human rights under South Korea's authoritarian regime. This book is also available in both Korean and English.

"I remember my uneducated mother, who would say during visits, 'Don't bow your head to such a dirty flock.'"

The following is the interview with Professor Suh Sung, touching on his imprisonment and post-prison activism.

On Suffering and Endurance

Gwangju News (GN): You spent 19 years in prison due to the 1971 so-called "Korean Spy Ring Incident." What was the most difficult moment for you during that time, and what gave you the strength to endure it?

Suh Sung: Unlike ordinary inmates, I was subjected to long-term solitary confinement and isolation, along with violence, torture, and relentless efforts at conversion of thought. That was the hardest part. However, I managed to endure, to some extent, thanks to the solidarity and trust among my comrades.

GN: Despite extreme ordeals such as torture, a death sentence, and a self-immolation attempt, what do you think enabled you to uphold your convictions?

Suh: At the time, I was only 26 years old and cannot claim to have had any clear ideology or conviction. I simply resisted the absurdity of a system, which uniquely revived the "conversion of thought" system, a remnant of the Japanese colonial rule, and which demanded blind obedience to the will of those in power. I remember my uneducated mother, who would say during visits, "Don't bow your head to such a dirty flock." The Park Chung-hee Yushin regime was truly a gathering of despicable individuals.

On Activism and Movements

GN: After your release, you actively participated in anti-torture and East Asian peace movements. What activity or achievement stands out most to you?

Suh: The international symposium movement on "East Asian Cold War and State Terrorism," which began in Taipei in 1997 and continued in Jeju, Okinawa, Gwangju, and Yeosu-Suncheon. Through this movement, we investigated the brutality of state violence against those who fought against imperialism and dictatorship, campaigned for the restoration of victims' rights and compensation, and achieved results, such as the enactment of the Compensation Law for Victims of the White Terror (unfair judgment) of the 1950s in Taiwan, the Jeju 4.3 Incident Truth and Honor Restoration Act, and similar legislation for the Yeosu-Suncheon Incident. These efforts laid the groundwork for independent movements and historical reckoning in each region.

GN: You have long been dedicated to international solidarity movements, such as addressing historical issues between Korea and Japan and joint actions against the Yasukuni Shrine. What do you see as the most urgent task for peace and human rights in East Asia today?

Suh: The objective and fair recognition of the past and subsequent historical reckoning – that is, acknowledging the crimes of imperialist aggression and rule, uncovering the truth, offering

apologies, punishing perpetrators, compensating victims, and preventing the recurrence of imperialist aggression and colonialism.

GN: As a long-time human rights activist, how do you perceive the differences in human rights consciousness and civil movements between Korean and Japanese societies?

Suh: The very concept of “human rights” is rooted in Western individualism, and “Western human rights” have often been used – under the guise of “civilization versus barbarism” – to justify the historical wrongs of imperialist domination. In Japan, which emulated Western civilization, historical responsibility has been exempted, and the universality of human rights is emphasized while avoiding fundamental issues like imperialist rule and colonialism, reducing human rights to a plain issue of “discrimination” and overlooking the core issue of sovereignty. In Korea, although the country still struggles with division and anti-communist sentiment, the resistance against the Yushin military dictatorship of Park Chung-hee, Chun Doo-hwan’s military regime, and Yoon Seok Yeol’s prosecutorial authoritarianism has led the people to realize that they are the true sovereigns of the nation and that the constitution itself embodies human rights.

On Teaching and Research

GN: While teaching comparative human rights law and contemporary Korean law and politics at Ritsumeikan University, what value did you emphasize most to your students?

Suh: I emphasized the importance of standing with the oppressed and becoming sovereign individuals who are independent from ruling powers.

GN: You have worked to promote Korea–Japan historical and cultural exchange, including founding the Korea Research Center. What was your most rewarding academic or social moment?

Suh: In 2007, I had the honor of inviting President Kim Dae-jung to give a lecture and facilitating dialogue between him and students, citizens, and Koreans in Japan.

On Present and Future

GN: Could you share your thoughts on the significance of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising for Korean democracy and the global human rights movement?

Suh: This is the theme of my lecture at this year’s World Human Rights Cities Forum. The Gwangju Uprising did not begin with good-looking, refined theories; it was a fierce struggle by those oppressed to the edge. That is the spirit of May 18. The events of May 18 were a “Gwangju Massacre,” a massive act of state violence against citizens, and the final stand of the citizen militia, surrounded at the provincial office, embodied the unyielding Gwangju Spirit.

The atrocities committed by the new military regime left deep wounds and a desire for vengeance in Gwangju, drawing overwhelming condemnation from both domestic and international communities. The uprising developed into the May Movement, demanding truth and justice, resulting in legislation for truth-finding, honor restoration, and compensation, and ultimately bringing Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo to justice.

The Gwangju Uprising was a miraculous event in which, within a generation, the people overthrew military dictatorship and achieved democratization. The annual commemoration of May 18 has become an established event. The Gwangju Uprising represents the most acute exercise of the right of resistance in East Asia. Gwangju will be remembered in human history as a city of resistance and a city of uprising, akin to Philadelphia or Paris, for standing against massive state violence. 🇰🇷

Photograph courtesy of **Suh Sung**.

The Interviewer



Shin Gyonggu has served the Gwangju International Center as its volunteer director for the past 26 years. He served as a professor for more than 30 years at Chonnam National University until his retirement in 2013. Dr. Shin is also the publisher of the *Gwangju News*.



Petals and Pathways

A Spring Escape to Gokseong

By Neha Bisht

Last year, I finally checked something off my spring bucket list in South Korea: the Gokseong World Rose Festival. Held each May in the peaceful county of Gokseong, Jeollanam-do, this vibrant celebration takes place in the heart of the Gokseong Seomjin-gang Train Village, a nostalgic and scenic gem that adds a whole new layer of charm to the floral experience. Our journey began in Gwangju, where we took an intercity bus to Gokseong. Once we arrived, we needed to transfer to a local city bus to reach the Rose Festival venue. However, like many rural places in Korea, the city buses run on fixed schedules, and unfortunately, we had just missed one. So, we had to wait for nearly an hour at the station. It wasn't the smoothest start, but it gave us a moment to relax and take in the slow pace of the countryside. Eventually, we boarded the bus to the festival, full of anticipation. But somehow,

in a twist of travel fate, we missed the actual drop-off stop and ended up getting off at a completely different location. At first, we were a bit lost, but as we looked around, we realized we'd stumbled upon something equally magical.

The area where we landed was incredibly scenic, with the gentle Seomjin River flowing nearby, surrounded by green hills and fresh countryside air. There was even a train museum at the location, which felt like a secret bonus stop. We ended up exploring a bit, taking photos, and just soaking in the peaceful beauty of the place. Still unsure how to get back to the main rose festival area, we were lucky to be approached by a kind ajumma (Korean lady) who noticed our confusion. She told us that the next bus would be coming quite late, and it might be best to take a taxi rather than wait for a bus.

To our surprise, she even called her taxi driver friend and arranged a ride for us. Moments like this are what make travel so special – unexpected kindness from strangers that stay with you. The taxi ride was absolutely beautiful. The road to the rose festival was lined with blooming trees, open fields, and traditional Korean countryside views. Every turn revealed another picturesque scene, and it honestly felt like a scenic journey in itself.

When we finally arrived at the Seomjin-gang Train Village, the festival was already in full bloom – literally. The entire path was surrounded by rows upon rows of roses, over 1,000 different varieties from around the world, filling the air with a soft, sweet fragrance. The colors were breathtaking – deep reds, coral pinks, creamy whites, and even rare lavender and blue hues. It felt like I had stumbled into a floral dream. The festival also had plenty of surprises beyond the blooms.

One of the highlights was the Golden Rose Photo Zone – a sparkling installation that created the

perfect backdrop for dreamy pictures. We also explored the lively Ttukbang Market, a fun, local-style outdoor market within the festival grounds. It had everything from snacks and handmade crafts to rose-themed souvenirs. Of course, I had to buy the rose perfume, which has a nice fragrance! There was even a Rose Waltz Party, where performers danced in the open air. While the day was beautiful, the real enchantment began at night. As the sun dipped behind the hills, the rose garden stayed open, softly lit with warm lights that created a glowing, romantic atmosphere. Couples strolled hand in hand, children laughed, and the whole space transformed into a floral wonderland. We caught a night concert, where live music played under the stars, adding to the dreamy energy.

But the roses are just part of the magic. What makes this festival truly unique is the setting: the Seomjingang Train Village, a nostalgic attraction centered around vintage steam locomotives and old-school railway vibes. I hopped on one of the antique trains that puffed slowly around the



A hand that picks not just a flower but the heart of spring – the Gokseong Rose Festival in full bloom.



The entrance to the Angel Rose Secret Garden.

village, and for those few minutes, I felt like I was riding through time. Rose gardens blurred into soft pastels as we chugged along, and the rhythmic clanking of the train added to the romantic mood. The blend of nature, nostalgia, and gentle motion was honestly therapeutic.

“The combination of natural beauty, heartfelt kindness, and a little travel spontaneity made the entire day feel magical.”

The village itself is a mix of the past and present – there’s a retro station, photo zones, cultural spaces, and even a small amusement area for families. While the kids ran toward mini train rides, I wandered toward the riverbank nearby and soaked in the quiet beauty of the Seomjin River. Everything was infused with a calm, joyful spirit. All around us, people were smiling and taking pictures – elderly couples, families with kids, young friends in matching outfits, all enjoying the flower-lined photo zones and the warm spring sunshine.

What struck me most was the balance between activity and serenity. Gokseong isn’t a bustling city – it’s peaceful, scenic, and inviting. Despite the unexpected detour, or perhaps because of it, this trip became one of the most memorable experiences I’ve had in Korea. The combination of natural beauty, heartfelt kindness, and a little travel spontaneity made the entire day feel magical. Spending the day in the Train Village among roses and trains made me slow down and just enjoy the present moment. No rushing, no noise – just flowers, vintage charm, and warm spring air.

If you are in Korea during May, I can’t recommend the Gokseong World Rose Festival enough. It’s not just a flower festival – it’s a peaceful, heartfelt escape into nature, nostalgia, and small-town charm. Whether you’re a lover of flowers, trains,



Performers elegantly dressed in vibrant costumes, reflecting the beauty and charm of the Gokseong Rose Festival.



A scenic bridge in Gokseong, perfectly connecting nature and charm – where rivers meet hills, and every path feels like a postcard.

photography, or just quiet beauty, Gokseong will stay with you long after the last rose petal falls.

Festival Schedule: This year, the Rose Festival is scheduled from May 16–25 (10 days), with ticket sales hours 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. During the festival, the Seomjingang Train Village remains open until 10 p.m., making it perfect for both early birds and night owls. 🌹

The Author



A native of India, **Neha Bisht** is pursuing her PhD research at Chonnam National University’s School of Materials Science and Engineering. She loves to meet new people and make new friends. Neha endeavors to contribute to the wellbeing of society in whatever way she can.

Amuse Jjimjil-bang in Mokpo

Finding Some Rest and Relaxation

By Maryam Ali

My favorite aspect of *jjimjil-bang* is how refreshed you can feel after a session. It isn't just a sauna. It's an experience. I take pleasure in the experience of resting after a meal and sweating it out in a sauna. Emerging in the 90s, *jjimjil-bang* in South Korea have become a tourist spot and regular meeting place for locals. Scientists proclaim that regular sauna use can improve heart function and relaxation, which reduces stress. I have found that my skin has felt clearer, and my mind has been able to relax more easily. Finding an affordable *jjimjil-bang* in Jeollanam-do can be slightly tough post-pandemic. I've personally enjoyed traveling

across South Korea to find a good *jjimjil-bang*. Some of my favorites have been Aquafield in Goyang, Centum City Spa Land in Busan, and Spadium24 in Namyangju.

In this article, I will document my personal experience visiting a *jjimjil-bang* closer to Gwangju in the city of Mokpo. I found it difficult to find a high-quality *jjimjil-bang* that could rival a major city. After days of searching online, I found Amuse Spa. A 24-hour *jjimjil-bang* and sauna based in Mokpo. The pictures were consistent. I could find the location on Apple Maps, Kakao Maps, and Naver Maps. I knew I had to go.

Journey to Amuse Spa

To get to Mokpo from Gwangju, you can use the intercity bus or the express train (KTX). I used the KTX website to get the tickets and was provided a QR code for the trip. I decided to visit the spa on the weekend to maximize my rest. I took a taxi to Gwangju Songjeong Station and had my KTX tickets prepared in advance. It took two stops to reach Mokpo from Gwangju. I recommend heading towards the parking lot to pick up a taxi, as that's where they congregate. From Mokpo Station, I took a taxi to the spa. I advise using Mokpo National University as a landmark to find Amuse Spa on Kakao Taxi. In total, the journey was about 22 minutes. An alternative to a taxi is taking Bus 1 from Mokpo Station to Jugong Hoeryong Village. The journey is roughly 48 minutes, with 38 minutes on the bus and a 10 minute walk.

Purchasing a Ticket

Amuse Spa is located on the second floor of the building. There are two routes to enter the spa. I made the mistake of entering through the



Entrance of Amuse Spa.

parking lot entrance, which takes a little longer to navigate the building. I recommend locating the main entrance near the stores, as you can choose to go up the stairs or take the elevator.

Tickets vary in tiers and are separated by the use of facilities. A membership system is also available at the spa. The price of a one-day ticket for a sauna and a jjimjil-bang is 20,000 won. An additional fee of 1,000 won per hour is imposed if you stay more than 10 hours. The ticket fee is paid at the reception desk. Once it is paid, a towel is provided, and you are asked what size clothes you would like. The colors of the clothes are determined by gender, size, and age, as children and adults are provided with different garments.

Shoes are removed at the entrance. A receipt with a number is given, which is used to pick up a wristband from the designated shoe lockers. This wristband is vital for paying for services in the jjimjil-bang – services like massage chairs, meals, vending machines, and snacks. Additionally, the wristband is used as a key to open and close the changing room lockers. You have the choice to shower and experience a public bath within the facilities.

The Facilities

Amuse Spa offers a variety of facilities, including a cold room and seven saunas (one was closed during my visit). The main hall has mats, beanbags, and a communal projector. A sleeping room and cave rooms for resting – as well as a food court, self-service ramen bar, and a snack bar. There's also a movie room, a game room, and a massage room. Families can enjoy the designated kid's play area, which includes a small playground and swimming pool with limited aqua play hours.

The cleaners diligently cleaned the facilities. This is important for a 24-hour service, as it shows excellent service. I enjoyed the massage chairs the most. They uniquely had a remote that could be used to change the settings of the chair.

The Food

The food court is self-service with a range of food

offered on the menu. I ordered the *miyeok-guk* (seaweed soup) and shared the shrimp fried rice with my friend. I used the wristband to pay for my meal. I enjoyed the seaweed soup but didn't like the *banchan* (side dishes) or the shrimp fried rice. After finishing the meal, I emptied the food waste and organized the dishes into designated trays at the corner of the food court. At the snack bar, I paid at the till with my wristband and chose to have a refreshing ice cream. During my visit, I found many families and children enjoying the facilities. A third space that brings people together.

It feels great to experience a high quality jjimjil-bang without taking a long journey to reach it. I used the autopay checkout to organize the outstanding balance for all the services I tapped with my wristband. I picked up my shoes from the shoe locker and left the facility.

It was affordable, the services were varied and diverse, it was regularly cleaned and spotless, and it was relaxing. Relaxed and happy, I took the KTX back to Gwangju. If you find yourself near Mokpo, check out Amuse Spa. I highly recommend it. 🍴

Amuse Spa

Open: 24 hours

Address: 2276 Namak-ri Samhyang-eup
Muan-gun Jeollanam-do

Phone: 0507-1469-7807

Website: http://www.amusespa.com/_namak

Photograph by **Maryam Ali**.

The Author



Maryam Ali is currently based in Gwangju. Originally from London, she took the plunge to live abroad and share her experiences in a blog. As a budding journalist, she expresses her fascination with culture, aspiring to understand the world around her. Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/maryamaliportfolio/homepage>

The May Mothers of Gwangju

By Park Yeonju



The May Mothers' House located in Yangnim-dong.

May has returned once again. Fresh green grass begins to sprout, and a gentle breeze flows through the air. But in Gwangju, many still carry the pain of “that day.” From young students to ordinary citizens, countless people poured into the streets to protect Gwangju on May 18, 1980. Of course, among them were women. There were women who prepared warm rice balls for fellow citizens.

Women who broadcast on the streets to inform others of Gwangju’s situation, Nurses who treated the wounded in hospitals. And those who cared for the injured in the streets.

On May 18, 1980, in the face of martial law troops, women of Gwangju raised their voices and stood their ground in various roles. Though the specific contributions of women during that time have not been highlighted, it remains an undeniable truth that they quietly stood as pillars of support for Gwangju. These very women later became part of the May Mothers, a group that continues to work so that Gwangju may one day be in full bloom again.

The May Mothers’ Association is a group of women whose family members were killed, imprisoned, or injured during the May 18 Gwangju Democratic Uprising. During the uprising, although the martial law troops brutally assaulted Gwangju citizens, it was the very citizens and students who tried to protect the city who were falsely labeled as “rioters.” They were arrested, causing their families to live in anxiety and fear.

The current head of the May Mothers’ Association, Lee Myung-ja, also had her husband imprisoned at the time. Not knowing where he had been taken, she searched desperately for him and went from place to place. Along the way, she naturally came into contact with other families of the imprisoned. In October 1980, when trials for the detainees began, these efforts led to the formation of a gathering of detainees’ families.

Right after the Gwangju Uprising, the city remained wounded and isolated. The military

regime was still in power, and there was no one willing to truly listen to or uncover the truth behind what the citizens of Gwangju had endured. Even close acquaintances avoided the families of the detainees, fearing that any association might bring trouble. In those lonely and fearful times, it was the families of the detainees who stood by each other. They became each other's strength and united to confront the truth.

Most of the detainees were brought before military courts, with some even sentenced to death or life imprisonment. The government branded them as rioters and strictly controlled the narrative, pushing it as if it were the only truth. Just as they had isolated Gwangju on May 18 and cut off all means of connection to the outside world. But the May Mothers stood strong. The spark of truth never died. To keep it alive, they carried on acts of resistance, including hunger strikes.

In 1981 the difficult trials continued. Even at the second trial, the court upheld the death sentence. This became a turning point that brought the families of the detainees even closer together. They stayed up all night handwriting leaflets titled "We Are Not Rioters" and took to the streets. To avoid police surveillance, they left at dawn and headed to Myeong-dong Cathedral in Seoul.

After mass, they stood on the podium to distribute their leaflets and spoke out about the Gwangju Uprising and the plight of the detainees. The detainee families' efforts for the release of their loved ones was intense and desperate. Then on April 3, the Chun Doo-hwan regime commuted the sentences of those sentenced through a special amnesty.

Since no one was willing to stand with them, they often clashed with police chiefs. When trials went against them, they even disrupted courtrooms. They had no choice but to act this way. Without such actions, the world was too cold and indifferent. It would have only driven the detainees' families further into despair. Despite the tremendous suffering and pain they had endured in 1980, the citizens of Gwangju had



The candle, the May Mothers symbol, on the house rooftop.

no time to heal. They were once again forced to defend themselves on their own.

They were beaten and injured at times, but they could not turn away from those who raised their voices. The experience they gained from fighting for the release of detainees became a powerful resource to support others who were also resisting injustice. They visited prisons across the country to advocate for better treatment of inmates. They also helped secure the release of those who had been imprisoned during various social movements. The May Mothers' Association acted with purpose and solidarity, ensuring that the pain and injustice they had endured would not be repeated by others in our communities and across the nation.

The May Mothers' Association was present not only during the June Struggle in 1987. They also stood with the people during the 2016 candlelight protests. More recently, they joined the movement calling for the impeachment of Yoon Suk Yeol, which concluded just recently.



A signpost leading to the May Mothers' House in Yangnim-dong.

On cold winter days, they offered warm rice balls filled with the spirit of May to the citizens of Gwangju who gathered in protest. In the end, the democratic spirit that began in 1980 once again helped protect South Korea's democracy. The May Mothers' Association raised their voices 45 years ago. And even now, they do not hesitate to speak out wherever they are needed. If there is something to protect, they step forward. When democracy in Korea wavers, they walk the path to stand firm as its pillar.

The May Mothers' Association created a space for ongoing community activities with its members. It also serves to honor the women who dedicated themselves to the May 18 Democratic Uprising. This space is called the May Mothers' House. It is located in Yangnim-dong in Nam-gu. The May Mothers' House also carries out various programs to engage with citizens. One such initiative is the May Mothers' Award. It recognizes individuals and organizations that have contributed to the advancement of democracy in South Korea. From 2007 to 2020, the award was given a total of 14

times. There is also a program in which the May Mothers themselves share personal stories about the May 18 Democratic Uprising. More recently, they have continued to participate in ongoing efforts and struggles. Their aim is to ensure that the truth of the uprising is not distorted and that a full investigation is properly carried out.

The May Mothers' Association is still writing its story today. In 1980, they lost family members or witnessed them being wounded. Even now, many mothers and women still cannot sleep well when the month of May comes around. This is not a problem that time alone can heal. The truth is that a full and proper investigation has yet to be carried out. There are still many who distort the May 18 Democratic Uprising by exploiting regional divisions. Though the May Mothers carry deep wounds in their hearts, they continue to embrace those who are working to change the world with warmth and compassion.

May has returned to Gwangju once again. Shouldn't a warm and peaceful spring also come to the May Mothers of Gwangju, who continue to live among us? To remember and not forget the May 18 Democratic Uprising is not just a matter for Gwangju. It is a task for all of us in Korea to uncover the full truth and to establish a just and accurate history. Today, the spring breeze in Gwangju may feel gentle, but it still carries with it streams of tears and pain. 🇰🇷

Photographs by **Park Yeonju**.

The Author



Park Yeonju is an undergraduate at Chonnam National University, majoring in political science and diplomacy as well as Chinese language and literature. Her third major is international development cooperation studies. She was born and raised in Gwangju and wants to promote

the colorfulness of the city that she has been a part of for so long. Also, she wants to deliver various voices of the world. It is her dream to become a true journalist by inheriting the spirit of May 18.

Walking the Path of History

The Significance of Democracy Road at Chonnam National University

By Dhivyaa S. P.

When I first chose Chonnam National University for my graduate studies, my decision was entirely academic. I was drawn by the work of a professor whose research perfectly aligned with my interests, and I didn't think much beyond that. I had no idea that I was stepping into one of the most historically significant campuses in Korea – one that had played a pivotal role in the nation's fight for democracy.

On a warm May morning, I noticed something unusual. The campus, usually filled with students on their way to class, was suddenly bustling. Buses pulled up near the main gate. Groups of people – some young, others much older – were gathering in clusters, listening attentively to guides. Some were placing flowers; others held hands and sang softly. I watched from a distance, curious. What was happening?

That day, I learned about Democracy Road, or *Minju-gil* – a path that winds through the university, connecting eleven memorial sites across the campus. It commemorates the May 18 Democratic Uprising, a powerful civil movement that began here in 1980 and spread across the country. Before that moment, I had never heard of May 18. Now, I felt like I had stepped into living history.

What Is Democracy Road?

Democracy Road is more than just a path. It's a historical and cultural trail that honors the bravery of students and citizens who stood up against dictatorship and military control. It's also meant to be a place where people can learn about





The Path of Justice trail.



A sculpture in the Educational Indicator Yard shows five stacked books for May and eleven leaves symbolizing the professors who boldly signed the 1978 statement calling for democratic education.

the values of freedom, human rights, peace, and justice.

Chonnam National University created this trail by linking three different walking routes, each with its own theme and meaning. Every year, especially in May, thousands of people visit to remember the events of the Gwangju Uprising and those who were part of it during those ten tragic days of 1980 (May 18–27).

The Three Routes of Democracy Road

The first route I explored was the *Jeongui-ui Gil* (정의의 길, Path of Justice, 1.7 km). It starts at the main gate – the historical starting point of the uprising – and leads past key landmarks like Park Gwan-hyun Hill, Yoon Sang-won Forest, and Kim Nam-joo Garden. These spots are named after student leaders who gave their lives for democracy. Along the way, I saw stones on the ground containing old protest slogans and poems – words that once inspired hope and courage.

The second route is the *Ingwon-ui Gil* (인권의 길, Path of Human Rights, 2 km), located on the eastern side of campus. This route tells the stories of people who were injured or killed while standing up for their rights. It includes memorial walls and quiet gardens with messages from students who were arrested or tortured during that time.

The third route is the *Pyeonghwa-ui Gil* (평화의 길, Path of Peace, 1.5 km), which winds through the western edge of campus. This route honors the dreams for peaceful unification and the efforts of students who believed in building bridges – not just across regions but across ideologies. It's quieter and greener, offering a place to contemplate what peace means in a fractured world.

Before arriving at Chonnam National University, I had never truly grasped the weight of words like “freedom” and “sacrifice.” But Democracy Road taught me. It taught me that democracy isn't just a system of governance – it's a path paved by real people, with real pain, love, and courage.

If you ever find yourself on this university campus, take the time to walk Democracy Road. You'll come out not just as a visitor but as someone newly connected to a generation that refused to be silenced. 📖

Photographs by **Arum Ayuningsih**.

The Author



Dhivyaa S. P. believes that every action, no matter how small, contributes to the bigger picture of change. Lately, her reflections have taken a more personal turn, inspired by the everyday systems that shape our lives in unexpected ways. Instagram: @my.hobby.page

Together Day

Building a Society of Respect for Each Other's Culture and Traditions

By Lee Boram

From a Homogeneous Nation to a Multicultural Korea!

The founding myth of Gojoseon, Korea's first kingdom, is a fascinating tale known as the Dangun myth. The story goes that Hwanung, the son of a heavenly god, descended to the human world. A bear and a tiger who wished to become human had to endure 100 days in a cave, avoiding sunlight and consuming only mugwort and garlic. The tiger gave up and fled, but the bear endured and was transformed into a woman, Ungnyeo. She later married Hwanung and gave birth to Dangun, who founded Gojoseon in 2333 BCE.

Even after thousands of years since the legendary founding of Korea by Dangun, all Koreans grow up learning this myth from kindergarten and

elementary school, and it has deeply rooted the perception that Korea is a homogeneous nation, descended from Dangun.

However, can we still call Korea a homogeneous nation today? On university campuses, people from various racial and national backgrounds are a common sight. In places like Gwangsan-gu, where many foreigners reside, Korean is not always spoken, and exotic foods and drinks are easily found in local markets and on the streets.

According to data released in 2024 by the Ministry of the Interior and Safety, Korea's total population was 51.18 million, with 2.46 million foreign residents, accounting for 4.8 percent – the highest in history. This data, reflecting figures from 2023, shows that Korea is approaching the



OECD threshold of five percent foreign residents, after which a country is considered a “multi-ethnic, multi-racial nation.” Korea is now on the verge of officially becoming a multicultural nation.

As Korean society transitions into one where immigrants play key roles in education, agriculture, industry, and entertainment, the Ministry of Justice enacted the Framework Act on Treatment of Foreigners Residing in the Republic of Korea. In 2007, May 20 was designated as “Together Day,” aiming to create a society where Korean nationals and foreign residents respect each other’s cultures and traditions. First celebrated in 2008, this year marks the eighteenth Together Day, soon approaching its twentieth anniversary.

But have societal attitudes and perceptions towards immigrants changed much over the past two decades? Many immigrants still report experiencing discrimination and prejudice in Korean society. There is ongoing concern not only about policies for immigrants but also about Korea’s cultural sensitivity and capacity for social integration.

While tools like ChatGPT and Google Translate often translate “세계인의 날” literally as “Global Citizens Day,” the Ministry of Justice has officially designated the English name as “Together Day,” emphasizing the importance of togetherness. This shift reflects a clear intention to foster an inclusive society where diverse cultures harmonize – not merely through integration but through mutual acceptance.

This aligns with Gwangju Metropolitan City’s vision of becoming an “inclusive city.” Gwangju was the first metropolitan city among major Korean cities to reorganize its municipal departments to establish the Department of International Residents, dedicated to policy and budget planning for its international population. It also functions as a unified control tower managing public–private–academic cooperation. In April 2024, Gwangju established

the Gwangju International Residents Center to provide comprehensive services to international residents.

With strong support and collaboration from the Department of International Residents, organizations such as the Gwangju International Center and the Gwangju International Residents Center, along with various organizations that provide services for international residents, are collaborating to organize this year’s Together Day celebration with even more diverse and meaningful programs.

Together Day 2025: May 24

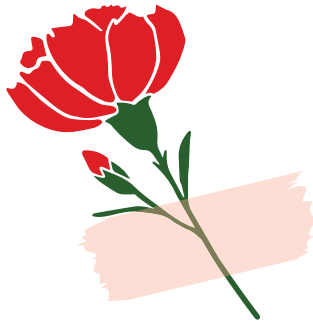
The 2025 Gwangju Together Day will take place on May 24 on the first floor of Gwangju City Hall. It will be a vibrant gathering where people of different nationalities and communities come together with Gwangju citizens to enjoy and share global cultures. Visitors can experience food and culture prepared directly by international residents, explore services offered by international resident support institutions, and even access embassy and consulate services. By collecting stamps at booths, participants can enter raffles to win a variety of prizes.

The Together Day celebration aims to promote the participation of foreign residents in local communities, raise human rights and cultural awareness among Gwangju citizens, and help them appreciate immigrant cultures and global cultural diversity. This will contribute to building a truly inclusive Gwangju.

May Korea continue its journey towards becoming a healthy multicultural nation – one that genuinely embodies the Together Day spirit of “respecting each other’s cultures and traditions while living together in harmony.” 🇰🇷

The Author

Lee Boram has been working as a volunteer, intern, and coordinator at the Gwangju International Center since 2010, and is currently serving as the manager of the International Support Team, carrying out various international exchange projects.



Teachers Day

Highly Commemorated in Korea

By David J. Richter

Teachers Day does not necessarily mean the same thing to all people around the world. World Teachers Day is celebrated on October 5, which is not when Koreans celebrate their version of Teachers Day. Korean Teacher's Day (Seuseung-eui Nal, 스승의 날) falls on the May 15. And while many countries do not really celebrate Teachers Day all too much, here in Korea it really is an all-day celebration.

It is said that the origin of the Korean version of Teachers Day goes back to 1963, when a youth group associated with the Red Cross visited their teacher who had fallen ill and was in the hospital. This event, however, did not take place on May 15. The observance was moved to May 15, King Sejong's (r. 1418–1450) birthday, two years later in 1965. Another piece of interesting history related to Teachers Day is that the commemorative day was banned in Korea from 1973 to 1982, during the later years of President Park Chung-hee's dictatorial reign and into the early stages of Chun Doo-hwan's. It returned as a holiday in 1983 and has been celebrated ever since.

Nowadays, Teachers Day simply refers to the day of the year when students show their gratitude towards their teachers. If the day falls on a weekend or other no-school day, Teachers Day will be observed on the closest school day before the actual holiday. While all teachers will receive presents from their students, often flowers, one teacher in the nation is given the award of "most outstanding teacher" each year by the Ministry of Education.

Teachers Day, as it is now celebrated, gives teachers and students a school day that focuses more on having fun and social interactions and pleasantries than it does on education. Students

prepare activities for their teachers, sing songs, invite their parents to school, or even teach classes in place of the teacher for this special occasion. Even former students make their way back to their old school to visit their former teachers and to partake in the day's events.

But this well-intended and innocent holiday is not without its controversies. There have been instances where, instead of simply giving the teacher a small gift to show appreciation, some parents hijacked this holiday to instead give teachers a large sum of money or other expensive gift to "encourage" the teacher to give their child preferential treatment.

As mentioned earlier, Teachers Day in Korea is not exclusive to current students. Former students also reach out to their former teachers to thank them for what they had done during these graduates' school days. This part of the holiday is, however, reported to be much less prevalent these days than it used to be.

While the stature of teacher in Korea may not be as revered today as it was centuries or even decades ago, it is still quite heartening to see that teachers here are more distinctly recognized for their contributions to education and to society than they are in many other parts of the world. 🇰🇷

The Author



David Jona Richter, born and raised in the extreme south of Germany, is a current graduate student at Chonnam National University. Before coming to Korea in late 2022, he spent about three years in Chicago in the U.S. Midwest. Besides his studies, he tries to engage in local communities in Gwangju and

elsewhere in Korea.

Teacher 365

Juggling a Multitude of Roles

By David Shaffer



When we think of “teacher,” many of us create the mental image of an adult with book in hand standing in the front of a classroom addressing a roomful of students listening attentively. We think of the teacher as holding a Monday-through-Friday, 9-to-5 job, or thereabouts. But how realistic is this stereotype of a teacher? For every teacher who confines their school-related work to school hours, there are easily a dozen who take hours of work home with them. A teacher’s work seems to never be done – seven days a week, 365 days a year. And unlike the mental image above, we shall see that a teacher’s job is truly multifaceted, with a multitude of roles to fulfill. May 15 is Teachers Day in Korea, but by looking at the language teacher’s multifarious roles, we will see why every day should be Teachers Day.

The Teacher as Controller

The mental image of “teacher” that we described above best typifies *the* role of controller. This is

one of the roles that a teacher has, but it should not be the role of a teacher. As controller, the teacher must arrange the learning environment. This entails maintaining a degree of control over classroom activities, giving instructions, and organizing activities. The controller role is quite evident in whole class activities where the activity centers around the teacher, often with the teacher imparting knowledge to the students, clarify grammar, and asking questions. The controller is also in charge of maintaining a physical environment conducive to learning: comfortable temperature, proper lighting, fresh air, and noise control.

The Teacher as Assessor

Another traditional role of a language teacher – or any teacher, for that matter – is that of assessing the students’ progress. This has conventionally been done by administering written midterm and final exams, as well as periodic quizzes. But in addition to this summative form of evaluating what a student has learned, teachers employ formative assessment as well to enhance learning rather than simply evaluate it. This provides continuous feedback to both the teacher and students during the learning process. By identifying strengths, gaps, and areas for improvement, formative assessments help teachers adjust their instruction to better support students in reaching course goals. Effective formative assessment techniques that the teacher may rely on are observation and anecdotal notes, class time polls and surveys, informal mini quizzes, exit tickets, concept maps, and peer and self-assessments.

The Teacher as Manager

In their role as class managers, EFL teachers are responsible for creating an organized and productive learning environment. This involves

establishing clear classroom rules and routines so that students understand what is expected of them in terms of behavior and class participation. Teachers must also make decisions on seating for whole-class activities (e.g., free or assigned), as well as for pairwork and groupwork (e.g., similar or differing proficiencies, or similar interests) to facilitate effective collaboration and communication. Time management is another key task for teachers to consider. Planned activities must be allowed sufficient time for students to successfully complete, and at the same time not be allowed to run too long to lose student interest.

The Teacher as Resource

One's first thought may be that this role is essentially the same as the role of controller in that they dispense knowledge to the students, clarifying grammar and asking questions. These are all things, however, that the teacher determines as being what is most important for the class to know. As a resource, the teacher makes themselves available to students to provide information that the student requests. These student queries may be related to grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, meaning, culture, lifestyles, or a multitude of other topics that students may be curious about. Fulfilling the role of resource is quite important, as it is through being curious and motivated that students learn best.

The Teacher as Prompter

When the student comes to the teacher-as-resource looking for help with some aspect of their learning, the teacher has two choices: They can directly provide the requested information, or they may provide a prompt that initiates problem-solving on the part of the student. This process may be iterative: teacher prompt, student response, teacher feedback and additional prompt, student response... The latter is more effective. Solutions discovered by students are better internalized than those provided directly by the teacher.

The Teacher as Monitor

Once the teacher has assigned their students

to do some activity – whether it be pairwork, groupwork, or individual work – they can sit at their desk or stand at their lectern or computer console and occupy themselves with something quite unrelated to the students' activity. Or they can, and should, involve themselves by observing the students and their progress with the activity. As the teacher moves around the classroom, they may elect to give corrective feedback on the spot and move on, they may instead offer a prompt for the student to attempt their own correction, or the teacher may opt to collect frequently made errors and discuss them at the end of the activity with the whole class. In addition, monitoring is helpful to the teacher in making improvements to their lessons for future use.

The Teacher as Participant

While the teacher is moving around the room during groupwork, they may elect to pull up a seat and insert themselves into a group for a period of time, not as an observer but as an active participant in the group's ongoing discussion of their task. This fosters engagement on the part of the students and strengthens student-teacher relationships. As a participant, the teacher may simultaneously perform the roles of teacher-as-resource, teacher-as-monitor, and teacher-as-prompter. Both the teacher and the students benefit from teacher participation.

The Teacher as Role Model

"Do as I say, not as I do" never works. If a teacher is frequently late for class or raises their voice to gather the class together, the students will think it is acceptable for them to do the same. The teacher is a role model, whether they consciously strive to be one or not. Therefore, it is imperative for the teacher to model desirable behavior.

Showing students how to conduct themselves through the teacher's actions will produce much more desirable results than merely telling them how they are expected to behave. Additionally, language teachers must model pronunciation, spoken language as opposed to written text, and speech acts, as they are fundamental to social interaction and communication.

In and Out of the Classroom

The roles mentioned above are just some of the roles of a classroom teacher. There are numerous other roles that a teacher assumes – some in and others out of the classroom. Here is a brief rundown.

- The Teacher as Counselor: Students often seek out their teachers to help them with school or out-of-school problems unrelated to their coursework.
- The Teacher as Admin: Administrative work is often assigned to teachers rather than to full-time administrative personnel.
- The Teacher as Professional Developer: Conscientious teachers are constantly seeking to improve their teaching skills through such activities as formal courses, individual study, and conference, workshop, and webinar participation.
- The Teacher as Mentor: The experienced teacher may volunteer to mentor a novice teacher new to their institution.
- The Teacher as Planner: In addition to preparing their individual lessons, a teacher may be charged with course design or curriculum development.
- The Teacher as Researcher: It is not uncommon for teachers to engage in academic research and present it at workshops or conferences, or report it in academic journals.
- The Teacher as Technician: In this edtech era of computers, software, apps, and AI, it is imperative for the teacher to be skilled in operating high-tech classroom equipment and incorporating educational technology into their classroom lessons.

As we have seen, a teacher is not just a “teacher” but is a multi-faceted educator, both in and out of the classroom, both in and out of their school, 24/7, entitling them to the moniker “Teacher 365.” 📅



Gwangju-Jeonnam KOTESOL Upcoming Events

KOTESOL International Conference 2025

- Date: May 10–11, 2025
- Venue: Sookmyung Women's University, Seoul

June Workshops

- Date: June 14, 2025 (Saturday)
- Workshop 1: Dr. Yeonseong Park on poetry
- Workshop 2: Valencia Epps on social justice
- Venue: Gwangju National University of Education

Check the chapter's webpages and Facebook group periodically for updates on chapter events and additional in-person and online KOTESOL activities.

For full event details:

- Website: <https://koreatesol.org/gwangju>
- Facebook: Gwangju-Jeonnam KOTESOL

The Author



David Shaffer, PhD, has been involved in TEFL, teacher training, writing, and research in Gwangju for many years as a professor at Chosun University. As vice-president of the Gwangju-Jeonnam Chapter of KOTESOL, he invites you to participate in the chapter's monthly teacher development workshops and in KOTESOL events and activities in general. In May, he invites you to consider participating in KOTESOL's international conference (May 10-11). Dr. Shaffer is a past president of KOTESOL and is the editor-in-chief of the *Gwangju News*.



The rock-face Buddha at Seoneun Temple's Dosol Hermitage in Wolchul Mountain (low relief).

In this issue of the Gwangju News, I would like to introduce Rock Buddha Statues on a Cliff Face: The Korean Maae-bul, a work by one of Korea's foremost art historians, Professor Lee Tae-ho.

During my time at Chonnam National University, I had the privilege of taking a deeply inspiring Korean art history course taught by Professor Lee. His classes extended beyond the lecture hall: We were assigned to sketch the Thousand Buddhas and Pagodas at Unju Temple and the stone totem figures at Bulhoe Temple. These assignments taught us to open our eyes to the cultural heritage that surrounds us – things we often overlook – and to appreciate them with wonder and reverence.

Buddha Statues on a Cliff Face

The Korean Maae-bul

Prepared by Kang Hyunsuk (Jennis)

Without question, Professor Lee's course was the most meaningful class of my university life. I consider it a great honor to have learned directly from him. I even wonder if it was thanks to Professor Lee that I, who never majored in art, have been writing an art column for the Gwangju News for many years now.

In celebration of Buddha's Birthday this May, I would like to share an excerpt from Professor Lee's work on maae-bul (마애불) or rock cliff-face Buddha statues. I recently had the opportunity to visit his studio and tell him how happy I was to have been one of his students. With his kind permission and my deepest gratitude, I here share his story on maae-bul.

Maae-bul

Maae-bul refers to Buddha statues carved directly onto the face of a cliff or rock wall. These cliff-carved images, or reliefs, come in two main forms: high relief, where the figure projects prominently from the rock surface, and low relief, where the carving is shallow and subtle.

Some maae-bul have thickly modeled faces while the bodies are outlined with engraved lines. Others feature only the head sculpted in three dimensions, with the natural rock surface forming the body. Still others are carved entirely with line work alone. These variations show the diverse techniques used in cliff carving.

Maae-bul, along with other rock Buddha statues in the form of relief or sculpture in the round, represent the pinnacle of Korean sculptural art. They also evoke the aesthetic of Buddhist paintings rendered on rock – a truly painterly sense of beauty carved into the rock.

Cultural Heritage of the “Granite Country”

Korea’s rock-carved Buddhas trace their formal origins to the rock-cut temples of India and China. In India, where Buddhism originated, and in China, which had a direct influence on Korean Buddhism, it was common to carve Buddhist images and reliefs into the walls of caves excavated from massive rock faces, creating spaces for worship and spiritual practice. These grand rock-cut temples, developed around the 5th to 6th centuries, were likely built under strong state patronage. Such construction was possible in mountainous regions composed of softer rock

like limestone or sandstone, which allowed for the excavation of dozens or even hundreds of chambers.

In contrast, Korea’s geography lacks such large rock masses suitable for constructing grand cave temples. Moreover, much of the country is underlain by hard granite, which is difficult to carve into. As a result, Korea developed its own unique form of sacred space: the maae-bul. These rock-carved Buddhas are sculpted directly into natural rock faces, becoming one with the land, and thus are immovable – left almost entirely intact in their original locations. This immobility allows modern viewers to vividly sense the spiritual mindset and aesthetic sensibility of their creators, as well as the geographic features of the chosen rock. In this sense, maae-bul can be regarded as early forms of environmental sculpture in a modern context.

Furthermore, maae-bul reflect a syncretic belief system combining Buddhism and indigenous shamanistic practices, a tradition that has continued from the time of their creation to the present. These sites create a space where nature, religion, art, and traces of everyday life coexist more harmoniously than in any other cultural heritage. Thus, in the history of Korean Buddhist art, the maae-bul stands out as a cultural treasure that embodies the essence of Korean spirituality and aesthetic values, harmonizing life and art without opposing nature.

Korea is often referred to as the “land of granite.” As is well known, the country has many mountains formed during the ancient geological age, and most are composed of large and small granite rock formations. Because Koreans have lived in close relationship with mountains for centuries, mountains have played a crucial role in shaping the character of Korean culture and art. From traditional graves and thatched roofs shaped like gentle mountain ridges, to architecture, sculpture, celadon, crafts, hanbok,

◀ The rock-carved sitting Buddha in Wolchul Mountain’s Wolgul-ri of Yeongam (high relief).



painting, calligraphy, and even dance and music – almost all forms of Korean cultural arts reflect the form and sentiment of mountains.

Likewise, the beauty of granite, with its hardness and warm color tones, has deeply influenced Korean aesthetics. Our ancestors brought out the natural charm and sculptural beauty of granite through rock Buddhas, pagodas, and other stone artworks. In particular, maae-bul, carved directly into granite cliffs, most effectively showcase the texture and form of granite rock.

Mountain Worship and Rock-Carved Buddhas

Mountains have long been the cradle of spiritual belief for Koreans. As places that reach close to the heavens, they have been regarded as sacred spaces where divine beings descend. From the grand mountains where state rituals were held, to the central mountains around which cities were formed, and even the village back hills where guardian spirits (*seonang-sin*) were enshrined, mountains have consistently served as the focal point of nature-based spiritual worship. It is believed that this tradition is also the reason why rock-carved Buddhas were primarily created in mountainous areas.

Mountain spirits (*san-sin*) were originally believed to inhabit specific sacred spaces or objects in nature. As such, large exposed rocks attracted special attention. Depending on the shape of the rock, a sense of sacredness was often attributed to it. Good examples include rocks shaped like animals, such as turtles, tigers, or dragons; those resembling human forms; and even rocks that resembled male or female genitalia, which became symbols of fertility.

At some point, Koreans began to pray to these rocks for personal or familial prosperity and fertility, as well as for the peace and protection of their communities or the nation. These practices have continued in shamanistic forms to this day. This is evidenced by people still writing names or offering prayers on notable rocks believed to be inhabited by mountain spirits.

With the introduction and establishment of Buddhism in the 4th to 5th centuries, spiritual focus gradually shifted toward the authority of the Buddha. This transition is most clearly expressed through the carvings of Buddha into rock surfaces. Like this, the phenomenon of harmonious co-existence of Shamanism and Buddhism during this period of religious intersection shows how Korean Shamanism embraced the new religion, and how Korean Buddhism, in turn, accepted indigenous beliefs.

Korean rock-carved Buddhas were created in a way that coexisted with shamanistic elements, without undermining the charisma of native spiritual traditions. Most maae-bul are not located at the very peaks of mountains. Even when large rocks that were ideal for carving were available at summits revered as abodes of mountain spirits, they were intentionally left without carvings. Looking at the locations of Korea's most iconic maae-bul, one can clearly see that this principle was carefully upheld.

The Korean Psyche Reflected in Rock-Cut Buddhas

The tradition of carving Buddhas into rock surfaces began around the 7th century in the Baekje Kingdom, with notable examples like the Seosan Rock-Carved Buddha Triad. This practice continued steadily for nearly 1,500 years, until the end of the Joseon Dynasty, resulting in over 200 rock-carved Buddhas found throughout Korea. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Korea's Buddhist culture developed hand-in-hand with these rock-carved images, establishing them as one of the most distinctly Korean forms of Buddhist art in the history of Korean art.

Korean rock-cut images of Buddha are fundamentally different from the traditional Western concept of sculpture, which seeks to extract the dynamic form of the human body from a block of stone, often completely erasing the stone's original shape. In contrast, Korean rock-carved Buddhas preserve the natural shape and surface of the rock. Rather than simply carving the Buddha as an absolute divine figure, these

works respect the spiritual presence believed to reside within the rock itself. As sacred beings breathing within nature and human life, these Buddhas are created by projecting the image of the Buddha onto the original shape of the stone.

Furthermore, Korean rock-carved Buddhas have been closely associated with faith in Maitreya – the future Buddha – since the early stages of their development. Maitreya is believed to come to this world in the distant future to create a more beautiful and peaceful realm. Rock-carved Buddhas embody this dream of a future paradise, reflecting a deep yearning for change and representing the secular lives and emotions of people throughout history. Because of this, these images of Buddhas did not remain confined to a single, idealized form. Sometimes they appear childlike, stern, or authoritative visages; or the friendly, down-to-earth appearance of a countryside elder. Free from rigid formalities,

these Buddhas reflect the diverse features and inner sentiments of the Korean people, engraved onto stone surfaces.

Few other works of art offer such a profound combination of historical religious significance and emotional artistic expression as Korea's rock-carved Buddhas. 🏯

The Author



Kang Hyunsuk (Jennis) was born and raised in Gwangju, a city of art and passion. A lover of nature, she has now chosen to spend a season of her life in Bukhan Mountain in Seoul. She considers it a great fortune to have met so many artists through the *Gwangju News*, and now, she is taking a short break from her column. But taking a break, of course, means she'll be back someday – doesn't it?



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Dano Day

The Sun's Energy Peaks

By Park Yeonju

“**T**hese chewy rice cakes are so delicious! But the rice cakes are shaped like a wheel. When do you eat rice cakes like this?” “Today is the 5th day of the 5th month, it’s Dano!” That’s right. The 5th day of the 5th month of the lunar calendar is considered the day when “sun energy” is at its peak and humans are closest to the sun god, Dano. This day is celebrated not only in Korea but also in China and Japan. Nowadays, many people don’t pay much attention to Dano, but it used to be one of the three major holidays in Korea, alongside Chuseok and Seollal. Unlike Chuseok and Seollal, however, it is no longer a public holiday, and its significance as a major holiday has faded quite a bit.

The 5th day of the 5th lunar month holds much significance in Eastern philosophy, particularly in the theory of the Five Elements (Fire, Water, Wood, Metal, Earth), which states that these five basic elements transform and interact within the universe to create all things. According to this theory, the number “5” is strongly associated with Fire, which is considered to be dominant in sun energy. Therefore, when the number “5” appears twice in a calendar date (5/5), it marks a time when the sun’s energy is at its peak. As a result, this day, thought to be filled with sun energy, came to be celebrated as a time to boost people’s health and vitality.

Dano marks the end of seed sowing in May, a festival in which people wish for a bountiful harvest after the rice planting while enjoying dancing and drinking. It is a gipungje, one of several rituals throughout the year for praying to the heavens for a good harvest. Celebrated in early summer, before the hot summer sets in, it is a holiday that ushers in the season. Therefore, it is also considered a folk holiday with a shamanistic aspect, meant to ward off diseases and various misfortunes during the transitional period leading into summer. Dano is said to have originated from Qu Yuan, a loyal minister of the ancient Chinese state of Chu.

Qu Yuan, who was highly talented and loved by the king, became the target of jealousy among treacherous officials. Eventually, after a new king ascended to the throne, Qu Yuan was exiled due to their slander. After the fall of the Chu Kingdom, Qu embraced a large rock and threw himself into the Miluo River, ending his life. This happened on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. To honor his spirit, people began holding memorial ceremonies every year. This tradition was passed down to Korea and became known here as “Dano.”

It is said that every year on this day, rice was placed in a bamboo tube and thrown into the water in a practice called surae to console the



Farmers' band performing at the Dano Festival. (KOGIL)

soul of Qu Yuan. This day is also called Surit-nal. On this day, a wild herb called surichwi (*Synurus deltoides*), which grows in the mountains, was picked and used to make rice cakes. The round shape of the rice cakes resembled that of a wheel, which is why they were named suri. The word “suri” also carries meanings such as high,” “above,” or “god,” so it can be interpreted as a high day or a day for honoring the gods.

The Dan of “Dano” means “first,” and the o means “five,” so together they imply the beginning of the fifth. In short, Dano is celebrated on the first “5” day of the fifth lunar month. Dano is also known in pure Korean as Surit-nal. The word suri means “cart,” which reflects the importance of carts in traditional farming, showing how essential they were for agrarian life in the past.

On Dano, there are several distinct customs. Women washed their hair and face with changpo (iris leaf) water as a ritual to ward off evil spirits. They also wore new clothes in red and blue and made binnyeo (hairpins) from changpo root to pin in their hair. On the other hand, men wore changpo roots around their waists to ward off misfortune. It was also believed that taking a bath on Dano would prevent illness, so people would do a Dano water ritual. People ate ssuktteok (mugwort rice cakes) shaped like a wheel.

On this day, Koreans also enjoyed activities such as traditional swinging (geune ttwigi) and wrestling (ssireum). Not far from Gwangju, you can experience the celebration of Dano, known as the Dano-je in Yeonggwang. The city is famous for its beautiful coastline and delicious gulbi (dried yellow corvina). Every



Yongwang-je, the Dano ritual practiced in fishing villages. (KOGIL)

year, Yeonggwang holds the Beopseongpo Dano Festival. Beopseongpo is a port and is famous for Yeonggwang gulbi. The Beopseongpo Dano Festival was registered as a National Intangible Heritage in 2012. The Beopseongpo region was an important center for managing state rice storage and fish markets during the Joseon Dynasty. This led to the early development of its commercial sector and naturally paved the way for the Dano Festival to emerge.

Did you know that the Dano Festival has been registered as a UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage? “Gangneung Dano-je” was included in 2008, recognized for its cultural uniqueness and outstanding artistry. It has been one of Korea’s most historically significant festivals, walking a beautiful and traditional path. Many of you may have heard of Dano, but perhaps you weren’t sure exactly when it takes place. It’s on the 5th day of the 5th month of the lunar calendar (May 31 this year), the day when the sun was thought to be closest to the earth. It’s a joyful event to pray for human health and prosperity. In Jeollanam-do, there is a festival in Yeonggwang where you can enjoy Dano in a unique and diverse way. Why not make your Dano in 2025 a little more special? 🍷



The Author

Park Yeonju is an undergraduate at Chonnam National University, majoring in political science and diplomacy as well as Chinese language and literature. Her third major is international development cooperation studies. She was born and raised in Gwangju and wants to promote the colorfulness of the city that she has been a part of for so long. Also, she wants to deliver various voices of the world. It is her dream to become a true journalist by inheriting the spirit of May 18.

American Dirt

Reviewed by Michael Attard

American Dirt

By Jeanine Cummins

400 Pages, Flatiron Books, 2020

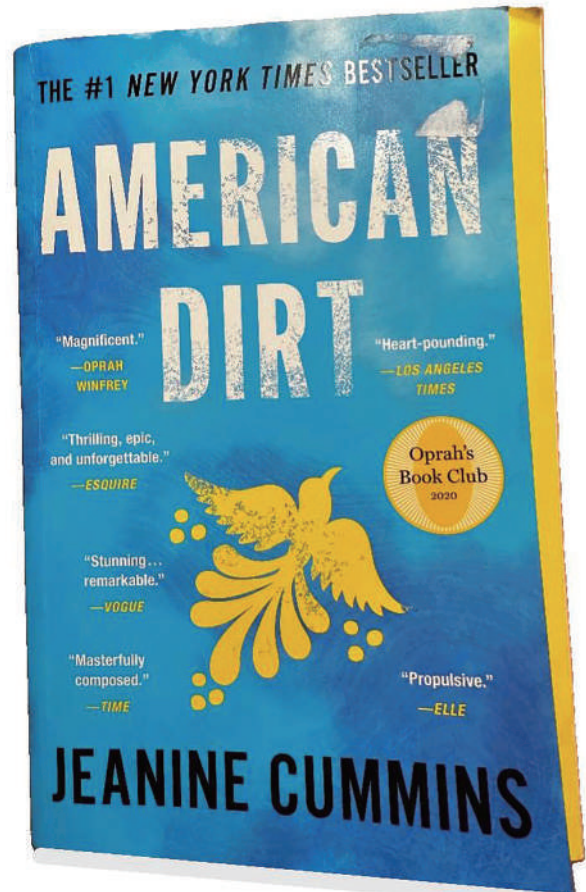
ISBN: 978-1250209764

The story is fiction, but the author, Jeanine Cummins, has grippingly brought to the fore one of the greatest social dilemmas, traumas, and moral issues of our time. Thus, it seems unjust to simply classify the book as fiction. Issues integral to the book are economic, political, and social. To simplify matters, it is fair to say the book is contemporary fiction. The time is now, the places are real, but the characters are fictitious.

On page one, at a family barbecue in Acapulco, people are being killed – young, old, everyone. Except for Lydia and her eight-year-old son, Luca, who happen to be in the bathroom. Lydia believes that she knows who has done this. Her husband, a journalist, had just published an article revealing the identity of a cartel leader. Regardless, the only thing to do is to get away from Acapulco. Throughout the book there is suspense, and action, which while expected, suddenly appears from nowhere.

“The story follows Lydia and Luca along their route of their escape to into the USA.”

There are no nuances among the characters. There are the protagonists, and the very bad antagonists. Although the cartel leader, Javier, imagines himself as a victim of fate and unable to change his circumstances: “Lydia will not feel empathy for him.”



Michael's copy of *American Dirt*. (Michael Attard)

The story follows Lydia and Luca along the route of their escape into the USA. Through these two characters and those they meet along the way, the author is actually telling the story of the thousands of real people, who have fled their homes in a desperate attempt to live in peace and dignity. Going to the USA or as migrants call it, “el norte,” is not as simple as buying a bus or plane ticket. The cartel controls the roads, with gunned check points. There is always a fee, and for Lydia and Luca, who are being hunted by the cartel, the danger is even greater. Flying out of Mexico is impossible, as Lydia has no identification for

Luca. They are destined to follow the migrants' route, via freight trains, known as "La Bestia," the beast. Lydia has no idea as to how they are supposed to do this. "She feels as though she is watching herself in a nightmare. ... Her eyes so big with fear they've almost left her body. They jump!"

The author never releases the psychological trauma and expresses it succinctly, often through Luca: "His muteness is pronounced." He knows what has happened to the family. "There is a tug of war in Luca's heart, between wanting to remember and needing to forget." They meet two very attractive teenaged sisters, fleeing from violence in their small mountain village. Their beauty is a pox upon them, and the physical violence they endure brings them to the breaking point.

"The author is actually telling the story of thousands of real people, who have fled their homes in a desperate attempt to live in peace and dignity."

Almost nothing goes well for Lydia. She is recognized by a young man (thanks to social media), who claims that he no longer wants to be a cartel member and that he too is fleeing. But Lydia is justifiably unassured. This Lorenzo, with his sickle tattoo underscored by three drops of ink, signifying blood and three kills, and the way in which he eyes the two sisters is malevolently threatening.

Sometimes there is help along the way. Migrant shelters provide a safe haven for a few days. A doctor stops to offer water and takes them to a hotel for a night where they can rest, feeling slightly safer. But virtually all trust has evaporated. When heavily armed, masked Mexican immigration agents force the train to stop, Lydia knows "they are not here to enforce the law.... The terror compels them to run ... she feels like prey." Being

Mexican is of little consolation. Compared to the migrants from central America, her status is only slightly better. There is no discount on what she must pay. Her voter ID card is proof she is a Mexican citizen. "It feels like a rescue boat and a torpedo at once."

The 400-page book is easy to read. While for the characters it seems to take forever to reach "el norte," the story is fast paced. Short, realistic dialogue keeps the reader in the midst of the ever-present danger and the debilitating psychological torture. There is little use of simile or metaphor, and description, when used, offers the rare chance to enjoy a calmer moment. The focus is upon escape and staying alive. There is little time for anything else.

The author's message would not be complete without some commentary on what happens to many of those who actually make it to the USA. This includes those who may have entered legally. These are the "deportados." Lydia and Luca are surprised that as they reach Tijuana, there are more people going south than north. But many of these deportados will try again. "They fled violence and poverty; gangs more powerful than their governments ... reach Estados Unidos or die on the road ... because staying at home meant their odds of survival were even worse."

When Lydia and Luca have gone as far as they can by train, it's time to entrust themselves to and pay the "coyote," the human smuggler. He is reluctant to take them because of Luca's age. He tells them, "There will be two and a half nights of arduous hiking." They are hot, they are cold when it rains, they hide in fear from vigilantes. "Every one of them despairs." 🇲🇽

The Author



Michael Attard is a Canadian citizen but has lived in Gwangju for over twenty years. He has taught English as a second language in academies and within the public school system. He is officially retired and spends time reading, writing, hiking, and spending time with friends.

The Legacy of the Garden of Soswae-won

By Park Nahm-Sheik

Comprised of a large garden in a wooded area in the heart of Jeonnam Province, not far from the Gwangju city limits, lies Soswae-won (소쇄원), which literally refers to a space that is clear, clean, and cool all at once. It is a fitting description of the breathtaking scenery that the area's groves of bamboo afford us. It conjoins nature and art seamlessly, resulting in an immaculate sight of rhythm, melody, and harmony.

Soswae-won was the brainchild of Yang San-bo (1503–1557), a loyal disciple of Jo Gwang-jo (1482–1519). Jo belonged in the inner circle of the palace during the reign of King Jungjong (r. 1506–1544). It was Jo's fate to die via a royally bestowed potion in Neungseong (today known as Neungju), where he had just earlier been banished for treason.

Neungseong was in the vicinity of Soswae-won, and Yang San-bo decided to return home to the town of Damyang, where Soswae-won itself was situated. He took up residence at Soswae-won

with plans to spend the rest of his life there in mourning, remembering his dearly beloved mentor and guiding light in a peaceful setting. Originally, "Soswae" came from Yang's pen name, which was thus a fitting moniker for this memorial site.

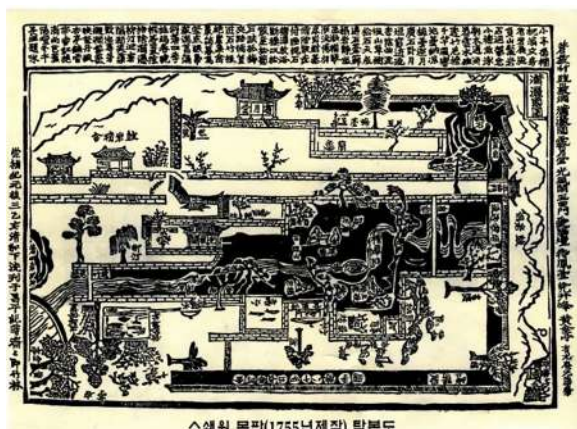
Before long, Soswae-won became a de facto forum for interchange of opinions among the leading intellectuals of the day. It offered a calm out-of-the-way haven for deep thinkers from near and afar to come together for serious discourse. Of the major movers and shakers of the day, Jeong Cheol, better known by his pen name Songgang (1536–1593), was likely the best-known personage associated with Soswae-won. In terms of seniority, expertise, and accomplishment, he was easily the most iconic face of Soswae-won.

What qualified Songgang to be a prime mover behind Soswae-won? In the first place, he was enough of a visionary to be a fitting soulmate with Yang San-bo, the sole financier-founder of the garden. Secondly, these two great minds got

together and birthed this outstanding think-tank way ahead of its time. Thirdly, Songgang's brush-stroke calligraphy graces the signboard hanging on the front entrance to Jewon-dang (the "Moon-Viewing Gazebo" on the premises of Soswae-won). Last, but far from least, Soswae-won was a living room of sorts, where Songgang entertained leaders of the local intellectual circle, moderating their wide-ranging discourse. On top of everything, Soswae-won was Songgang's private study where he could immerse himself in scholarly pursuits of choice.

Among Songgang's most prominent masterpieces are *Gwandong-byeolgok* (An Ode to Gwandong) and *Samiin-gok* (An Ode to His Majesty the Sovereign). Gwandong was an older name for the Gangwon Province area. *Sok-samiin-gok* (Sequel to Samiin-gok) is yet another great lyrical work attributed to him. These two great works of poetry eloquently testify to his deep-rooted attachment to the beauty of Gwandong and to his fervent allegiance to the Supreme Ruler of the Kingdom as well.

During his preeminent career, Songgang was appointed to a succession of highest-level government portfolios. He was the provincial governor of Gangwon Province, Jeolla Province, and Hamgyeong Province (now in North Korea). As if this wasn't enough, he was made the occupant of the three highest positions in the central government: Prime Minister, Right Minister, and Left Minister.



16th-century woodcut map of Soswae-won. (KOGIL)



Songgang, Jeong Cheol.

A friend of mine by the name of Jeong Gu-seon is Songgang's best-known living descendant. I am honored to count Jeong among my close friends. We went to the same middle school in Gwangju back in the early 1950s. More power to him as contemporary torchbearer for the great institution that Soswae-won has all along been in our hearts. Not many cultural institutions in Korea today can compare to Soswae-won. Let me close by proposing three cheers for Soswae-won, Songgang, and Jeong Gu-seon. 🍷

The Author



Park Nahm-Sheik is a native of Gwangju. After graduating from Chonnam National University, he went on to receive a master's degree at the University of Hawaii and a PhD (applied linguistics) at Georgetown University, both in the U.S. Upon completing an illustrious career at Seoul National University, Prof. Park served as president of the International Graduate School of English.

Area Sports Round-Up

A monthly overview of local sports, featuring area teams and brought to you...

By Zhang Jiuzhou (Julius)



Tigers in action. (Kia Tigers)

Kia Struggles Early Despite High Expectations

As the 2025 KBO season kicked off, media outlets released results from a pre-season survey predicting this year's regular-season champion. Approximately 46 percent of respondents selected the Kia Tigers, reflecting fans' high expectations for key players like reigning champion James Naile and rising star Kim Do-yeong.

A separate survey of all 10 KBO team managers revealed that both the defending champions Kia Tigers and the LG Twins were unanimously viewed as the top contenders for the new season. One club manager commented, "The reigning champions are still building strength. The void left by Jang Hyun-sik's departure seems to be filled by Cho Sang-woo, acquired via trade. With the return of Yun Young-cheol and Lee Eui-lee from injury, the squad looks stronger than ever." A head coach added, "Kia maintains a solid balance between pitching and hitting, and the chemistry between veterans and younger players is excellent."

Despite strong pre-season assessments, Kia has stumbled early in the standings due to several

challenges. Injuries to star hitters Kim Do-yeong and Kim Seon-bin have disrupted the batting lineup, but the underlying issue lies in the team's overall lack of offensive efficiency. While the starting rotation posted a respectable ERA of 2.91, the bullpen struggled mightily, recording a league-worst ERA of 7.62.

Additionally, defensive errors have plagued both the infield and outfield, leading to an overall sense of instability in pitching, hitting, and base running. For Kia to regain momentum, they must revitalize their offense and stabilize their bullpen. Last season, the team clinched its first unified title in seven years, thanks in large part to a dominant bullpen. Should the pitching staff recover, the Tigers may still mount a strong title defense.

Reis Shines in Gwangju FC Return

In the K League, Gwangju FC's attack is flourishing once again with the return of Brazilian forward Reis, who rejoined the club after a two-year stint with Jeju United (now Jeju SK). Reis previously led Gwangju to the K League 2 title in 2022 and helped the team secure promotion to the top flight.

Explaining his return, Reis noted that after a frustrating 2024 season with limited minutes, he was contemplating his future when he received a call from Gwangju head coach Lee Jung-hyo. "That call helped me make my decision," Reis said.

Reis has wasted no time re-establishing himself as a vital piece of Gwangju's offensive setup. Operating between the striker and winger roles,

he's been instrumental in leading the attack. His quick adaptation to Lee's tactical system and resurgence in form have earned him the nickname "Gwangju's Strike Captain" from fans.

A seasoned veteran, Reis contributes on both ends of the pitch with relentless energy. His high appearance rate is also encouraging – after logging 1,867 minutes last season, he is already nearing 1,000 minutes this year. Club officials attribute his improved fitness to rigorous personal training. "I was shocked to see how much muscle he gained after returning from Jeju," one official noted.

Reis's presence has eased the burden on teammate Asani, whose scoring opportunities have increased as defenses focus more on the Brazilian. Together, the duo has accounted for more than half of Gwangju's goals this season. With Reis in top form, fans are hopeful he can surpass his personal bests. While he scored 12 goals and provided 4 assists in K League 2 in 2022, he has yet to record double-digit goals in the top division. His best K1 season was in 2023 with Jeju United, tallying 8 goals and 5 assists. "In my current form, 10 or even 20 goals is absolutely possible," Reis said confidently.

Peppers Finish Historic Season Amid Uncertain Future

In women's volleyball, the AI Peppers wrapped up their 2024–2025 V-League season with a record of 11 wins and 25 losses, totaling 35 points. While their league standing did not change, the team achieved several historic milestones: most wins in a season, highest point total, longest winning streak, and at least one victory against every opponent.

The Peppers were especially dominant in December, winning six matches – the most in any month in club history – and in addition, they secured their first-ever three-match winning streak in January this year. Under the guidance of head coach Chang So-yun, who took the helm this season, the team displayed notable progress.

"It's unfortunate that our ranking didn't improve," Chang said. "But I believe we showed meaningful growth by continuing to win games. As a first-year coach, I had my share of trial and error, but we overcame those challenges and became stronger."

She added, "Our initial goal was to reach 10 wins, and achieving that was our greatest accomplishment this season." Chang also expressed gratitude to the fans. "Ultimately, a professional team exists because of its supporters. I know fans had high hopes, and while we gave it our all, they may still feel disappointed. But thanks to those who stood by us, we made it through. We promise to return next season with a new look."

However, the club's future remains uncertain due to financial troubles at its parent company, Pepper Savings Bank. The bank posted a net loss of 76.2 billion KRW in Q3 2024 – marking the industry's largest loss for a second consecutive year – and has undergone major restructuring, cutting one-fifth of its workforce. Given that operating a professional volleyball team typically costs between 6 and 10 billion KRW annually, questions are mounting about whether the bank can continue to support the team.

At the Asian Quota Draft held in Seoul on April 11 by the Korea Volleyball Federation (KOVF), the AI Peppers selected Australian outside hitter Stefanie Weiler. Weiler, who previously played for GS Caltex in the 2024–2025 season, scored 161 points in 10 matches with a 33.74 percent attack success rate. Whether she can help lead the AI Peppers to even greater achievements next season remains to be seen. 🏐

The Author



Zhang Jiuzhou (Julius) is from Harbin, China. He began writing in 2022 and has contributed to the Chinese media in Gwangju. He concurrently serves at a sports data company. He is pursuing a master's degree in media and communications and is responsible for the Chinese Students Association at Chonnam National University.

The Mastermind Behind Gwangju FC's Rise

Lee Jung-hyo

By Zhang Jiuzhou (Julius)

In various locations across Gwangju, billboards featuring photos of former President Kim Dae-jung, author Han Kang, star baseball player Kim Do-yeong, and Gwangju FC head coach Lee Jung-hyo hang side by side. When asked about his inclusion among such distinguished figures, Lee humbly responded, “I don’t think I’m at their level yet.”

Yet, for many, Lee Jung-hyo is the most compelling figure in Korean football today. Under his leadership, Gwangju FC reached the AFC Champions League Elite (ACLE) quarterfinals, becoming the only Korean club to advance that far after defending champions Ulsan Hyundai and traditional powerhouse Pohang Steelers were eliminated.

Appointed in the 2022 season, Lee quickly implemented an aggressive high-pressing, fluid attacking style that brought immediate success. Gwangju FC won the K League 2 title in 2022, earned promotion to K League 1, and finished third in 2023, securing an ACLE berth. In 2024, the club has not only stayed competitive in K League 1 but also advanced to the final eight in Asia’s premier club competition.

Unlike many top-tier coaches, Lee did not have a decorated playing career. He was not part of Korea’s historic 2002 World Cup squad and has never played for the national team. Starting from the bottom as a coach, he has carved out a name for himself purely through coaching merit. Internet forums are filled with anecdotes



Coach Lee Jung-hyo. (Gwangju FC)

of Lee analyzing tactics in coffee shops with his laptop – an image that has become symbolic of his relentless drive.

His laptop, as staff say, takes time to boot due to the sheer volume of data it contains: hundreds of training sessions, files on domestic teams, and detailed tactical breakdowns of European giants like Manchester United, Manchester City, Liverpool, Ajax, and lately, Arsenal.

Despite a packed fixture schedule, Gwangju has remained consistent. However, Lee never allows complacency to creep in. He demands discipline and unbroken focus from his players. A recent incident during Gwangju’s 1–0 home win over Jeju SK on April 6 demonstrated this. Lee, serving a suspension, was in the stands when winger Oh Hu-seong was substituted and showed visible frustration. After the match, Lee addressed the

situation in the locker room, emphasizing attitude over results. "Individual behavior affects the team's spirit," he reportedly said. "I don't care about the scoreline – I just want every player to give their all, every minute on the pitch."

Oh Hu-seong later acknowledged his mistake: "I completely understand why coach Lee said that. I was just trying to stay on because I felt good today, but I'll reflect on it and be ready for the next match." Lee himself softened afterward: "Oh is passionate and works hard. I just want him to take a broader view."

Midfield general Choe Kyoung-rok, who returned from a decade in Germany to reunite with Lee, explained, "Even in structured German football, I never saw tactics this detailed. Coach Lee's passion and preparation are on another level." Brazilian attacker Reis, who rejoined Gwangju this year, was equally complimentary: "Coach Lee is the best in K League. His strong personality and direct communication are refreshing. I've never met anyone like him in Brazil or Korea." Center-back Bruno added with a laugh, "I've never met a coach like him in my entire career. He's intense, emotional, and always pushing us to improve. As he grows, we grow too."

Under Lee Jung-hyo's supervision, Gwangju FC continues to punch above its weight. Despite lacking a single national team player, the team consistently produces results that rival Korea's best. Lee's impact is undeniable – and the story of Gwangju FC's meteoric rise is, in large part, his own. 🏆

The Author



Zhang Jiuzhou (Julius) is from Harbin, China. He began writing in 2022 and has contributed to the Chinese media in Gwangju. He concurrently serves at a sports data company. He is pursuing a master's degree in media and communications and is responsible for the Chinese Students Association at Chonnam National University.

May Upcoming Events

MUSICALS

I Wasn't in Gwangju



Dates: May 15–18 (Thu.–Sun.)
Venue: Asia Culture Center, Arts Theater 1
Reservations: Asia Culture Center website
Admission: 30,000 won
Age Restriction: 14 years of age or older
Inquiries: 1899-5566

A Thousand Blues



Dates: May 30–31 (Fri.–Sat.)
Venue: Asia Culture Center, Arts Theater 1
Reservations: Asia Culture Center website
Admission: R seats 70,000 won, S seats 50,000 won
Age Restriction: 8 years of age or older
Inquiries: 1899-5566

PERFORMANCE

Gwangju City Ballet – 140th Regular Performance <DIVINE>



Dates: May 16 (Fri.) - May 17 (Sat.)
Time: May 16 (Fri.) at 7:30PM
May 17 (Sat.) at 3:00PM
Venue: Grand Theater, Gwangju Culture & Art Center
Reservation: www.ticketlink.co.kr
Age restriction: None
Admission: R seats 30,000 won, S seats 20,000 won, A seats 10,000 won

EXHIBITIONS

2025 ACC Contact: “Our Bodies, Embedded with Others”



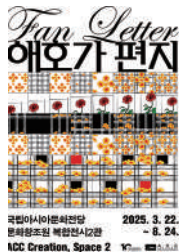
Dates: Apr. 17 – June 29
Venue: Asia Culture Center,
Creation Space 6
Reservation: Free viewing
Admission: Free
Age Restriction: No restriction
Phone: 1899-5566

Landscape Theater of Lee Lee Nam



Dates: Apr. 4 – July 6
Venue: Asia Culture Center,
Creation Space 5
Reservations: Free viewing
Admission: Free
Age Restriction: No restriction
Phone: 1899-5566

Fan Letter



Dates: Mar. 22 – Aug. 24
Venue: Asia Culture Center,
Creation Space 2
Reservations: Free viewing
Admission: Free
Age Restriction: No restriction
Phone: 1899-5566

ORCHESTRA

Gwangju Symphony Orchestra - 395th Regular Concert “Brothers”



Date: May 30 (Fri.)
Time: 7:30PM
Venue: Grand Theater,
Gwangju Culture and Art
Center
Reservations: www.ticketlink.co.kr
Admission: R seats 30,000 won,
S seats 20,000 won,
A seats 10,000 won
Age Restriction: None

EVENTS

World Human Rights Cities Forum 2025



The World Human Rights Cities Forum, now in its fifteenth year, has established itself as a human rights event that discusses the future vision of human rights cities. This year marks the 45th anniversary of the May 18 Democratization Movement and the 80th

anniversary of the end of World War II, reflecting domestic and international situations, such as ongoing wars, state violence, and human rights suppression. It has therefore selected the theme “Peace and Solidarity: Human Rights Cities Resisting War and Violence.”

Dates: May 15–17 (Thu.–Sat.)

Venue: Kim Daejung Convention Center

Reservations: Access the Forum’s homepage to pre-register (www.whrcf.org)

Admission: Free

Hosts: Gwangju City, UN OHCHR, UNESCO, National Human Rights Commission, Gwangju Office of Education

Together Day 2025



Together Day is a national commemorative day established in 2007 with the purpose of “creating a multicultural society where people of various ethnicities and cultures understand and coexist with each other.” It is celebrated on May 20th every

year. To commemorate Gwangju Together Day, a global festival where various Gwangju world citizens gather together to share and exchange cultures, will be held on May 24th at Gwangju City Hall. We ask for your interest and participation.

Date: May 24 (Sat.)

Venue: Gwangju City Hall



GWANGJU TOGETHER DAY 2025

MAY 24 SAT

11 A.M.-6 P.M.
Gwangju City Hall

Memorial Ceremony 11:00-11:30
Booth Operation 11:00-18:00

GLOBAL FOOD & CULTURE BOOTH

Global Food Zone
Enjoy authentic flavors from around the world brought to you by diverse international communities.

Global Culture Zone
Immerse yourself in the cultures of the world through traditional experiences from various countries!

GLOBAL VILLAGE

Organizations for Int'l Residents
Take advantage of this great opportunity to explore a wide range of services from different organizations!

Pop-Up Consulate
Meet with consuls and ambassadors from different countries to address your concerns. (Countries TBA)

RAFFLE EVENT

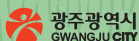
Raffle time to get prize!
Travel the world at Together Day, collect stamps along the way, and enter for a chance to win prizes! The prize draw will take place at 5 PM on the day.



GLOBAL CITIZEN BUSKERS

Busking with Diverse Nationality Performers!
Enjoy busking by traditional performance teams from various countries and communities.

HOST



ORGANIZER



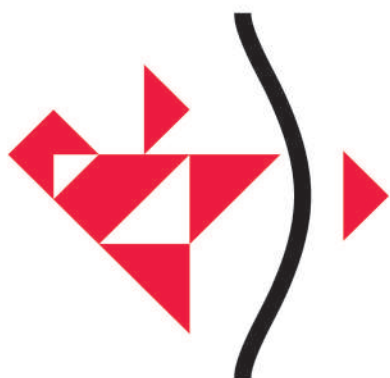
광주가
다! 즐거움이 온다
2025 광주광역시
9월 광주에서 만나요!



대회누라집(KOR)



Website(ENG)



The Echo of Peace 평화의 에코

광주 2025

현대세계양궁선수권대회

GWANGJU 2025 Hyundai World Archery Championships

2025. 9. 5.~12.

광주 2025

세계장애인양궁선수권대회

GWANGJU 2025 World Archery Para Championships

2025. 9. 22.~28.



광주광역시
GWANGJU CITY