

ARTICLE

Jürgen Hinzpeter and Foreign Correspondents in the 1980 Kwangju Uprising

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German journalist Jürgen Hinzpeter won the 2003 Song Kun-ho Press Award for his reporting of the 1980 Kwangju Uprising. He was also the subject of documentaries and the 2017 hit movie *A Taxi Driver*, which credit him as the first journalist to expose the Kwangju Uprising to the world. In fact, Hinzpeter was one of many journalists who revealed what had happened at Kwangju. Since the production of the 2003 documentary *Hinzpeter – the Blue-Eyed Witness to May 1980*, interest in the many other foreign journalists who covered Kwangju has been elided, raising the question of why only Hinzpeter's contribution is remembered and celebrated. Using ideas about historical memory developed by Paul Cohen, I argue that a narrative about Hinzpeter's actions in Kwangju has emerged, which has little to do with who first broke the news of the Kwangju Uprising. The story of Hinzpeter's relationship with the South Korean democratization movement as well as the film he shot of the moment Kwangju citizens seized power and established an alternative government to military rule – have become important weapons for the activist generation in an ongoing struggle over the memorialization of the Kwangju Uprising.

Keywords: Kwangju Uprising; *A Taxi Driver*; Jürgen Hinzpeter; Chun Doo-hwan

Introduction

The Kwangju Uprising was one of the most tragic and controversial explosions of violence in recent South Korean history. The mass protests against General Chun Doo-hwan's (1931–; president 1980–88) 1979–80 seizure of power led to the deaths of between 200 and 2000 Kwangju civilians.¹ The Kwangju Uprising is more commonly referred to by its official state-sanctioned appellation, the 5.18 Kwangju Democratization Movement (O il p'al Kwangju minjuhwa undong), because of the catalytic impact it had on South Korean politics.² The massacre of Kwangju civilians politicized a generation of young South Koreans, propelled the push towards democratic government, and led many to question the strong political ties to the United States (which was widely accused of complicity in the killings).³

Overseas media correspondents played a vital role in bringing the story of the Kwangju Uprising to the attention of the world. During the uprising, Kwangju's citizens gave foreign reporters an ecstatic reception, believing overseas journalists could help bring about a peaceful resolution to the crisis through their embassy contacts, an important implication I discuss below.⁴ The people of Kwangju

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¹No definitive figure has been established; Tenney 1992, p. 71.

²Shin 2003, p. xxvii.

³*Ibid.*, pp. xxii–xxv; Shorrock 1999, p. 151.

⁴Fenton 1988, p. 241.

also saw overseas correspondents as a vital conduit for information to the outside world.⁵ The South Korean military authorities attempted to contain information about the uprising through the heavily censored state-controlled national press and thereby prevent the escalation of violence elsewhere.⁶ Overseas correspondents could transfer their reports directly to publishers abroad, thereby bypassing official censorship.

Public awareness about the activities of overseas correspondents in Kwangju increased with the late 1990s appearance in South Korea of a series of books about their role (outlined below). This public interest in the activities of the overseas correspondents at Kwangju coincided with the emergence of what Don Baker calls a “hero myth” related to Kwangju. Baker argues that between the late 1980s and early 1990s, a new narrative emerged presenting the Kwangju participants not as “victims” of state repression but as “heroes” – political activists who risked their lives to build democracy.⁷ Baker draws on the ideas of Paul Cohen, who investigates the interrelationship between three ways of knowing the past: as lived experience, event (the historical reconstruction of the past as practised by historians) and myth – or the creation of symbolic meanings from historical events to serve the needs of the present.⁸ The emergence of the hero narrative coincided with wider attempts to revise the history of Kwangju into a struggle for democracy.⁹ These shifts came in a context of greater political liberalization, the indictments of former Presidents Chun Doo-hwan (1980–88) and Roh Tae-woo (1988–93) for their roles in the massacre and the emergence of a new generation of bureaucrats influenced by the anti-dictatorship struggle.¹⁰

The South Korean state manipulation of reports about Kwangju started a battle to uncover the truth about what happened in May 1980 that has continued to the present day – through Chun’s dictatorship, the subsequent period of democratic government and periodic attempts to resolve the Kwangju controversy, such as the 1997 indictment of Chun and Roh. In May 2017, current Republic of Korea (ROK) President Moon Jae-in (1953–; 2017– present) vowed to open an investigation that would finally uncover the truth about Kwangju, repeating a pattern of successive South Korean presidents who made bold statements about the need to discover the truth, while at the same time remaining reluctant to do the one thing that might draw a line over much of the controversy by releasing official state records from the period.¹¹ Instead, records of the uprising have been opened to the public in a piecemeal fashion by a state concerned about the toxic revelations that may appear.¹² One result of the lack of any full official accounts is the increased importance of other forms of historical evidence about the events of May 1980, specifically foreign media reports and eyewitness testimony.

The testimony of foreign correspondents who witnessed the massacre has played an important part in this struggle for truth. One publication focussing on the reporting of overseas correspondents from the uprising was commissioned by an NGO – Kwangju Citizens Solidarity (KCS). The preface stresses the importance of the testimony of foreign correspondents to the memorialization of the Kwangju Uprising. For the KCS, foreign correspondents are a vital source of unbiased information because they are “unmoved by patriotism or ideological concerns. ... Their voice is the voice that shall be believed. They can communicate when others are forced into silence.”¹³ This statement is important because it refers to accusations that Kwangju citizens colluded with North Korea against the South

⁵*Ibid.* Scott-Stokes, Shim and Pons 2000, p. 111.

⁶For pro-regime content see: *Han’guk Ilbo* 1980, Hinzpeter 1997, p. 46, and Scott-Stokes 1980b.

⁷Baker argues the “victim” narrative focussed on the brutality inflicted upon the people of Kwangju, whereas the “hero” narrative stressed their resistance to the military; Baker 2003, pp. 88–91.

⁸Cohen 1997.

⁹Shin 2003; Hō 2012.

¹⁰Shin 2003, p. xxvi; Cumings 1999, p. 30.

¹¹Kim Tong-hyung 2017; Taet’ongnyōng Sosok Ŭimunsa Chinsang Kyumyōng Wiwōnhoe 2004, p. 212.

¹²In November 2019, the Minister of Defence Chōng Kyōng-du was forced to apologize over revelations about sexual assaults committed by troops upon Kwangju civilians during the uprising; BBC 2018. The Roh Moo-hyun government (2003–2008) struggled with how to memorialize the troops killed suppressing civilians during the uprising; for details about official state promises about resolving historical issues related to Kwangju, see Kim 2011, p. 611.

¹³Journalists Association of Korea 1997b, p. x.

Korean state. Such accusations were widely made against the 1980 Kwangju protestors at the time by the military authorities as part of a misinformation campaign designed to discredit the protestors. Occasionally, groups or individuals challenging the legacy of Kwangju repeat these allegations of communist collusion against participants in the uprising (addressed in detail below). Making accusations of North Korean collusion against foreign journalists who witnessed Kwangju, however, has proved far more challenging. Activists still struggling to preserve the democratic legacy of Kwangju consider the accounts of overseas correspondents as external observers to be more objective and reliable witnesses to a historical injustice.

German journalist Jürgen Hinzpeter (of the ARD-NDR German TV-Network) is one overseas correspondent who covered Kwangju and who has risen to prominence in recent years. The story of Hinzpeter's reporting at Kwangju was made famous by the recent hit movie *A Taxi Driver* (T'aksi unjõnsa, dir. Jang Hoon, 2017), one of the highest-grossing films in South Korean cinematic history. Hinzpeter also received the 2003 Song Kun-ho Press Award from the *Hankyoreh* newspaper for his reporting of the events at Kwangju, and was the subject of two documentaries as well as televised South Korean news reports. Following his death in 2016, Hinzpeter's remains were buried in Kwangju's May 18 National Cemetery – a site that commemorates the contributions of those who died in the massacre to the establishment of South Korean democracy.¹⁴

Hinzpeter was not the only overseas journalist in Kwangju reporting the uprising, there were many others and this raises a question about the privileging of Hinzpeter as a witness to Kwangju, namely why is it that Hinzpeter's actions are recorded and celebrated for posterity while the contributions of other overseas correspondents have been largely forgotten? This is a question I investigate in this article. Returning to Cohen and Baker's notion of mythologization, I argue that Hinzpeter's actions have been mythologized. For Cohen "myths" are not "out and out falsification[s],"¹⁵ they are "one-sided because they ... focus on or isolate particular elements of an event, taking them out of their original context in order to make them more applicable to more recent concerns."¹⁶ For both Cohen and Baker, one task of the historian is to reflect upon the process of mythologization and its relationship to the lived experience of participants, and to speculate upon why this has taken place.¹⁷ In this article, I reflect upon the process of the mythologization of Hinzpeter. I analyse the different texts that have helped form what I call the "Hinzpeter narrative" and compare eyewitness accounts of journalists who were in Kwangju during the uprising, how they entered the city and how they got their stories out to the world. I argue that Hinzpeter's story has not just dominated because of an individual reporter's heroic actions during the uprising. Reasons for privileging Hinzpeter's narrative relate more to what *followed* the uprising – particularly in the retelling of his actions, and over what Hinzpeter has come to represent to members of the activist generation engaging in an ongoing political struggle over the memorialization of Kwangju.

The Kwangju Uprising

The Kwangju Uprising occurred during a period of political turbulence in South Korea. The assassination of Park Chung Hee in October 1979 left a power vacuum that was filled by the December 12 Coup of General Chun Doo-hwan and future president Roh Tae-woo's military faction. This seizure of power angered those Koreans who had hoped Park's death would usher in greater democratization.¹⁸ In spring 1980, mass demonstrations erupted nationwide. Chun Doo-hwan responded by declaring martial law and arresting student leaders and major opposition figures, including Kim Dae-jung.¹⁹ The authorities sent troops to enforce martial law in major cities including Kwangju.

¹⁴Chosun Ilbo 2004.

¹⁵Cohen 1997, p. 214.

¹⁶Baker 2003, p. 90.

¹⁷Cohen 1997, p. xv.

¹⁸Shin 2003, p. xiv.

¹⁹*Ibid.* Clark 1988, p. 12.

Between May 18 and 20, student demonstrations in Kwangju were brutally crushed by paratroopers using batons, bayonets, and live rounds, prompting its citizens to turn against the martial law forces.²⁰

By May 21, the citizens had armed themselves, driven the military out of town, and were in control of Kwangju with their HQ in the Provincial building (the seat of local government). Kwangju's citizens organized themselves into a settlement committee to keep order, negotiate with the martial law authorities and maintain and oversee a citizen's army to defend against military attacks. Rival factions emerged within the settlement committee between those who favoured the negotiated return of arms and radicals who urged a final stand against the army. When ceasefire talks stalled, the radical faction led by Yun Sang-wŏn eventually seized control, but was crushed by the military authorities, which recaptured Kwangju in the early hours of May 27.

The Hinzpeter Narrative

A narrative has emerged about Hinzpeter's actions in Kwangju, which has been shaped by different texts: Hinzpeter's own written and oral testimony, the account provided in the citation from his *Hankyoreh* [*Han'kyŏrae*] Song Kun-ho Press Award, the motion picture *A Taxi Driver* (along with the publicity and media materials that appeared after its release), and two documentary films about Hinzpeter. In 1997, two compilations of foreign correspondent eyewitness reports of Kwangju were published. Hinzpeter's personal account of his actions at Kwangju: "An Eyewitness Report of the Kwangju Citizen's Uprising in 1980" appeared in *Kwangju in the Eyes of the World: The Personal Recollections of the Foreign Correspondents Covering the Kwangju Uprising*. This piece was translated into Korean in 5.18 *T'ŭkp'awŏn ripotŭ* (Special correspondents' report of the 5.18 Kwangju Uprising), a publication commissioned by the Journalists Association of Korea (Han'guk kijahyŏphoe).²¹ Hinzpeter's piece was reprinted (with a new title: "I Bow my Head") in a third volume of journalist accounts: *The Kwangju Uprising: Eyewitness Accounts of Korea's Tiananmen* in 2000. This book was edited by *The New York Times* Tokyo correspondent Henry Scott-Stokes and former Kwangju student activist Jai Eui Lee [Yi Chae-ŭi]. Selections from Hinzpeter's written accounts are recounted verbatim in a translated Korean commentary in the KBS documentary *Hinzpeter: the Blue-Eyed Witness to May 1980* (hereafter, *Blue-Eyed Witness*).²² This documentary film also features interviews with Hinzpeter and was broadcast on May 15, 2003. The December 2003 Song Kun-ho Press Award citation consists of an introduction (in Korean and translated into English) by the award selection committee explaining the rationale behind the award, a biography of Hinzpeter and a transcript of Hinzpeter's own acceptance speech.

A Taxi Driver meets the definition of what Julian Stringer calls an "event movie" – a film that targets a mass audience through maximum media exposure.²³ Publicity and media reports appeared in the run-up and following the release of the film in August 2017, sparking immense public interest in its subject matter and helping contribute to its popularity. Intense media interest focused on Hinzpeter's relationship with the driver who got the journalist in and out of Kwangju, Kim Sa-bok.²⁴ There was even a special screening of the film attended by ROK President Moon Jae-in and Hinzpeter's widow Edeltraut Brahmstaedt.²⁵ All this publicity helped contribute to the event status that surrounded the Korean release of the film and to its success. The film was shown on 1,500 screens nationwide, going on to achieve ticket sales of ten million just three weeks after its release.²⁶

Media articles and publicity that appeared along with the film stress the film's historical authenticity by emphasizing the fact that it was based on "true events."²⁷ Media assertions of historical

²⁰Song et al. 2001, pp. 102–3; Shin 2003, pp. xiv–xvi; Lee 1999, p. 56; Clark 1988, p. 12.

²¹Journalists Association of Korea 1997a.

²²Hinzpeter had brown-hazel coloured eyes. South Korean media frequently uses "Blue-eyed" to refer to non-Koreans.

²³Stringer 2003, p. 2.

²⁴Bae 2017.

²⁵Jung 2016a.

²⁶Kim Jae-heun 2017.

²⁷Joongang Ilbo 2017.

accuracy were supported by statements from figures such as President Moon who, following the special screening, praised the portrayal of how “a foreign reporter’s [Hinzpeter’s] efforts contributed to Korean democratization.” Moon also claimed that “The truth about the uprising has not been fully revealed. This is the task we have to resolve. I believe this movie will help resolve it.”²⁸ Mike Chopra-Gant argues that this type of media report and other publicity materials help shape viewers’ “horizons of expectation” and the way audiences consume a particular work.²⁹ The media reports and publicity that appeared around the release of *A Taxi Driver* helped underline the film as a final authoritative version of the foreign correspondents’ actions in Kwangju.

In the wake of the phenomenal success of *A Taxi Driver*, South Korean networks, including MBC (Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation) and Arirang, broadcast television reports about Hinzpeter.³⁰ On May 17, 2018, a second documentary, *5.18 Hinzpeter Story*, was put on general release in Seoul. Its director, Chang Yŏng-ju, had interviewed Hinzpeter and directed the original 2003 documentary *Blue-Eyed Witness*.³¹ *5.18 Hinzpeter Story* follows the chronological format of *Blue-Eyed Witness*, focussing on Hinzpeter through his coverage of the uprising, and post-uprising reports on the South Korean anti-dictatorship democratization movement, up to his forced retirement through ill health. While most content is largely identical, *5.18 Hinzpeter Story* features more of the original 2003 interviews, includes additional information about his relationship with Kim Sa-bok, and interviews with the journalist’s widow about Hinzpeter’s desire to be interred in Kwangju. Why Chang remade his own documentary using virtually identical materials is an issue discussed below.

A comparison of *Blue-Eyed Witness*, the award citation, *5.18 Hinzpeter Story*, and *A Taxi Driver* – all of which have helped form the Hinzpeter narrative – reveals strong inter-textual relationships, a fact that has vital implications for how the narrative was perpetuated, as I argue. The overall narrative that emerges about Hinzpeter’s time in Kwangju is one that occasionally contradicts Hinzpeter’s own recollections as well as the accounts of other correspondents who were working in Kwangju at the same time. These discrepancies indicate Hinzpeter’s is one of several competing accounts that make up the overall story of correspondents at Kwangju. An analysis of Hinzpeter’s recollections and a comparison with accounts from other correspondents offer us a better understanding of the work of foreign journalists in Kwangju.

In the following section, I summarize three central elements of the Hinzpeter narrative, which I then compare with Hinzpeter’s own written accounts of his actions at Kwangju and the recollections of other foreign correspondents. I examine, firstly, the ease with which foreign correspondents could enter and exit the city to make their reports; secondly, the dangers they faced in getting their stories out; thirdly, the story of which journalist it was who first “broke” the story of the slaughter at Kwangju to the world. Accessibility, danger and journalistic rivalry dominate accounts by media workers who were at Kwangju and are central to the Hinzpeter narrative.³²

Accessibility of Kwangju

A key element stressed in the film *A Taxi Driver* and documentaries *Blue-Eyed Witness* and *5.18 Hinzpeter Story* is the difficulty faced by Hinzpeter in entering and leaving Kwangju, which emphasizes the scale of his achievement in making his report and getting it out to the world.³³ According to *A Taxi Driver*, Hinzpeter was driven from Seoul by Kim Sa-bok along deserted major roads supposedly closed to all traffic. The car passed through a first military roadblock with few difficulties, but was turned away at a second roadblock and forced onto smaller country lanes to find an alternative route into Kwangju. Hinzpeter disguised the

²⁸Kim Tong-hyung 2017.

²⁹Chopra-Gant 2008, p. 23.

³⁰MBC produced a news feature entitled, *Blue-eyed Witnesses, Remembering Kwangju*. Arirang’s *4 Angles* commemorated the May 15–16, 2016 burial of Hinzpeter in Kwangju.

³¹Park 2018.

³²Lee Sang-hee, 2003; Cheongam Press Foundation 2003.

³³KOFIC 2018, p. 16.

fact that he was a journalist and fabricated a story to the commander of a third roadblock, claiming that he was going to retrieve a business partner stranded by the disturbances in Kwangju. The commander believed Hinzpeter's story and allowed the three men to enter Kwangju. Thanks to the ingenuity of the pair, they were able to breach the military's defences of the city against the odds.

The concept of a Kwangju that was hermetically sealed to foreign correspondents is important because it emphasizes another element surrounding the Hinzpeter narrative: the virtual elimination of other overseas correspondents from the story of how news of Kwangju reached the outside world. This is reflected in *A Taxi Driver*, as well as the Song Kun-ho Press Award citation and both documentaries, which ignore the presence of all other foreign correspondents in Kwangju. The 2018 documentary *5.18 Hinzpeter Story* stresses that a BBC camera crew and reporters were prevented from reaching Kwangju on May 23 by military forces, and claims that "only" Hinzpeter was able to enter the city (41:50).

Dangers Faced by Correspondents

A second feature of the Hinzpeter narrative concerns the dangers he faced getting his film of Kwangju to the outside world. *A Taxi Driver*, the Song Kun-ho Press citation and the two documentaries *Blue-Eyed Witness* and *5.18 Hinzpeter Story* all state that Hinzpeter's life was put at considerable risk as he tried to enter and leave Kwangju.³⁴ *A Taxi Driver* shows security forces attempting to eliminate Hinzpeter and Kim during their flight from Kwangju. The film's climax also features a twenty-minute sequence in which plain-clothed Defence Security Command (secret service) agents fire upon and chase Kim and Hinzpeter in an attempt to prevent news of the massacre getting out of the city.

Who "Broke" Kwangju?

The third feature of the Hinzpeter narrative is perhaps the most important and enduring of all, and contends that it was Hinzpeter, above all the other overseas correspondents in Kwangju, who first exposed news of the massacre to the world. The award citation, motion picture and the documentaries highlight Hinzpeter's contribution to the exclusion of all other journalists. In the citation, it is Hinzpeter who "informed the world of this tragic event."³⁵ *A Taxi Driver* features no foreign news media correspondents other than Hinzpeter. Other media representations and authorities on the Kwangju Uprising also clearly accept Hinzpeter as the first journalist who broke Kwangju to the world. Following Hinzpeter's death in 2016, the February 2 KBS Nine o'clock News and MBC's *Blue-eyed Witnesses, Remembering Kwangju* stated that it was Hinzpeter who *first* made the Kwangju Uprising "known to the world." Publicity material for *5.18 Hinzpeter Story* states that apart from Hinzpeter, "the media completely neglected Gwangju [Kwangju]."³⁶ *Blue-Eyed Witness* and *5.18 Hinzpeter Story* both allege that the first images of the Kwangju violence broadcast internationally were those of Hinzpeter (shown on West German networks). *5.18 Hinzpeter Story* also states that CBS was the second broadcaster in the world to report Kwangju on May 23.³⁷ Kim Yang-rae, the Executive Director of the May 18 Memorial Foundation (O ilp'al kinyöm chaedan), a Kwangju-based NGO dedicated to the promotion of academic and popular understanding of the Kwangju Uprising, explained in an interview to *Arirang's 4 Angles* that until Hinzpeter's film was broadcast on West German television there had only been "a few lines on Kwangju" from the world's press, and that the Associated Press (AP) had only displayed "a single still image" of the violence.

Overall, according to the Hinzpeter narrative that has emerged in the wake of his award and the release of the documentaries and *A Taxi Driver*, Hinzpeter risked his life to enter a virtually inaccessible Kwangju and in doing so became the first overseas journalist to break Kwangju to the world.

³⁴KOFIC 2018, p. 16; Lee Sang-hee 2003. For example, *Blue-Eyed Witness*: 7:10 and 35:30; *5.18 Hinzpeter Story* 34:29.

³⁵Lee Sang-hee 2003.

³⁶KOFIC 2018, p. 15.

³⁷*5.18 Hinzpeter Story* 35:34.

What Is Missing from the Hinzpeter Narrative

An examination of Hinzpeter's own written recollections, the accounts by overseas correspondents at Kwangju and the news reports of Kwangju from the period of the uprising shows that the reality was far more complex than has been implied. In his own 1997 recollections, Hinzpeter occasionally contradicts himself about how he entered Kwangju and about the foreign press that were present there. Hinzpeter writes that upon his arrival in Kwangju there were "few foreigners in the city that we knew of or could reach." However, later in the same account he admits that he was in competition with the foreign press correspondents at Kwangju to get the story about the uprising out first.³⁸ Interviews from 2003 also contradict his written accounts about his entry into Kwangju. Hinzpeter claims in these interviews his ruse about needing to enter Kwangju to save his boss was used during a *later* visit to Kwangju (on May 23), after he had got his original story about the massacre out to the world. Hinzpeter states he initially entered Kwangju after passing only two roadblocks, and that Kim drove through side roads into Kwangju with relative ease.³⁹ Poor memory and the passing of time might explain these contradictions in his story.

Hinzpeter's written accounts also reveal an important tension. On the one hand he expresses constant surprise at the relative ease with which he was able to enter Kwangju, and on the other he tends to play up the scale of his achievement in smuggling out his film. His recollections frequently cite official statements and popular understandings relating to Kwangju's supposed inaccessibility but express surprise that the opposite was true. Upon his arrival on May 19, Hinzpeter reports that, "All routes to the south were blocked, *it was said ...*" and that "The military had cordoned off the whole area. *That was the story.*"⁴⁰ Later he remarks that, "Every possible way into Kwangju was being sealed off. *That was the impression.*"⁴¹ Hinzpeter also expresses his incredulity at the apparent ease with which he could enter Kwangju: "The sign on the expressway said "CLOSED." Yet our driver Kim was not put off. We sailed down an empty highway. That deserted expressway gave me the strangest feeling. *Surely, we would be stopped.*"⁴² [All emphases added by the author.] Hinzpeter adds qualifications to each of the above statements, as if to show that contrary to what was claimed by the military authorities, Kwangju had not been hermetically sealed off to the outside world. Chun Doo-hwan's military authorities were nominally in control of the entire country, but this did not mean that Chun retained the loyalty of all state institutions or even all branches of the military, which might explain how Hinzpeter and other journalists managed to penetrate the roadblocks with little difficulty.⁴³

Despite the ease with which he entered Kwangju and his doubts about the efficacy of the military authorities' attempts to blockade the city, Hinzpeter also stresses the difficulties his party faced entering the city: "The Martial Law Command, the supreme authority in those times, was clearly trying to keep the foreign press out of Kwangju."⁴⁴ By so doing, Hinzpeter emphasizes his achievement in breaching the military barriers and getting his story out, stating, "... nothing would hold me back. I was determined to get through."⁴⁵ In other words, it was his will and heroic ingenuity that got him into Kwangju and his story out to the world. Why do these contradictions exist in his account? Cohen writes that one significant aspect of the direct experience of participants in past events lies in the "biographical and motivational consciousness" of witnesses.⁴⁶ Memories of events do not remain static in the minds of participants, who "engage in a continuous process of renarrativization reconfiguring their own past again and again in response to new circumstances with a view to maintain a sense

³⁸Hinzpeter 2000, p. 71.

³⁹5.18 *Hinzpeter Story* 43:00.

⁴⁰Hinzpeter 2000, p. 66.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³For examples of attempts by individual officials to subvert official directives, see: Hinzpeter 1997, p. 32 and p. 47; Fenton 1988, p. 242.

⁴⁴Hinzpeter 2000, p. 67.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁶Cohen 1997, p. 64.

of personal integrity and coherence.”⁴⁷ In other words, Hinzpeter, who wrote his account in the late 1990s, was not outcome-blind to the significance that Kwangju had on South Korean democratization. He himself appears to engage in some personal mythologizing about his past role. This may explain the tension in his account. Hinzpeter wanted to report what had happened accurately (that it was relatively easy for him to enter and leave Kwangju and he was one of many correspondents there), but he also sought to create a lively text that would justify the scale of his achievement.

The first two aspects of the Hinzpeter narrative – the difficulty of entering Kwangju and the absence of other foreign reporters – are very much at odds with the contemporary accounts of journalists. Terry Anderson, working for the Associated Press (AP), reported the presence of at least a dozen overseas correspondents, including Henry Scott-Stokes and Shim Jae Hoon of *The New York Times*, Philippe Pons of *Le Monde*, Sam Jameson of the *Los Angeles Times*, Bradley Martin of *The Baltimore Sun*, Gebhard Hielscher of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Norman Thorpe of *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, Masanako Saitoro of the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, Donald Kirk and others.⁴⁸ Larsen also reports the presence of US and Japanese network channel camera teams.⁴⁹ In addition, there were correspondents, among them the British journalist James Fenton, who were driven from Seoul for day-long visits by taxi drivers. These journalists negotiated the army cordon using various methods. James Fenton reported that he breached the roadblocks thanks to the skills of his taxi driver and his incessant “talking, talking, talking.”⁵⁰ Terry Anderson and his crew flew to an unnamed nearby town in Chölla Province and entered Kwangju via country lanes on foot after their not-so-courageous taxi driver abandoned them when shooting started.⁵¹ After the state’s military forces withdrew from the city, the army’s grip on the city often appeared quite lax. Henry Scott-Stokes reported that on May 26, “Kwangju was not cut off from the outside world, as I had imagined from news reports, we just drove into the place, using minor roads.”⁵² Not only were foreign correspondents able to enter Kwangju to witness the massacre, they also managed to leave the city to file their copy. By the early morning of May 22, it was impossible for anyone to make long-distance telephone calls out of Kwangju, and correspondents had to leave the city to get their reports and photographs out. Terry Anderson reported that he borrowed bicycles and rode twenty kilometres along small country lanes past paddy fields to the nearest town with a post office.⁵³ Many foreign journalists were able to leave and re-enter the city on multiple occasions. Hinzpeter was able to enter Kwangju twice;⁵⁴ Shim Jae Hoon and Phillippe Pons entered and re-entered the city three times over the course of the week.

Hinzpeter’s written recollections of the physical risks he faced differs radically from the Hinzpeter narrative as offered in the films and documentaries. Hinzpeter states that at the second roadblock into Kwangju rifles were aimed at their car *in case* Kim decided to run the roadblock. Other than that, Hinzpeter’s written account indicates he never felt physically threatened by the military.⁵⁵ In contrast to Hinzpeter, other overseas correspondents came under serious threat while collecting reports in Kwangju. Terry Anderson has the distinction of being shot at by both sides. In attempting to enter the city, Anderson was mistaken for a government soldier and fired upon by the Kwangju Citizens Army. He was only saved by his knowledge of the Korean word for journalist, *kija*.⁵⁶ During the final assault on the Provincial building, government troops fired upon Anderson and other overseas journalists around him. Foreign journalists had been housed in a hotel close to the Provincial building. Paratroopers had surrounded the hotel ready for their final assault on the defenders of the Provincial

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁸Scott-Stokes and Lee 2000, p. xix; Journalists Association of Korea 1997; Anderson 2000, p. 49.

⁴⁹Larson 1990.

⁵⁰Fenton 1988, p. 240.

⁵¹Anderson 2000, p. 48.

⁵²Scott-Stokes, Shim and Pons 2000, p. 112.

⁵³Anderson 2000, p. 49.

⁵⁴Hinzpeter 2000, p. 72.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p.71; Hinzpeter 1997, p. 47.

⁵⁶Anderson 2000, p. 48.

building. When Anderson leaned out of a hotel room window to take photographs, paratroopers had opened fire and Anderson and his colleagues were forced to flee to the other side of the hotel after the bullets penetrated the thin walls.⁵⁷ He wrote, “We had believed the government knew this hotel was occupied by foreign press, but either no one had told the soldiers or they didn’t care.”⁵⁸ Anderson said that he felt lucky to have survived, a very different experience to that of Hinzpeter.⁵⁹

While *A Taxi Driver*, the two documentaries, various news programmes and the Song Kun-ho citation imply that it was Hinzpeter who is most responsible for revealing the truth about the Kwangju Uprising to the world, the reality is not so simple. Hinzpeter himself writes candidly of the competition that existed among the assorted reporters, photographers and film crews to get the story of Kwangju to the wider world:

Those cut-off [telephone] lines put me in an unusual situation. Normally TV could not compete with print media in those days in getting a first crack at a story. Film had to be shipped and developed. That took time. However, newspaper people needed telephones. There were none, or at least they were cut off. I could beat the newspapers to it, for once. Timing is all in the news business.⁶⁰

He claims that the military’s communication clampdown on Kwangju meant that in contrast to what was usually the case, he was in a position to break the story.⁶¹ It is noteworthy that Hinzpeter never claims to have been the one to break the story of Kwangju to the world.

Hinzpeter was undoubtedly aware that many journalists could legitimately claim a “first”, because there was a wide array of firsts in the international reporting of Kwangju and it is worth recalling these. The first reports and live images of violence in Kwangju were broadcast on the CBS Evening News of May 19, the day Hinzpeter arrived in Seoul from Tokyo (he arrived in Kwangju on May 20). The May 19 report by the late Bruce Dunning featured May 18 images of students and civilians with stones battling paratroopers armed with clubs. Dunning added his commentary from Seoul.⁶² Phillippe Pons published an article detailing the early outbreak of violence in the May 20 morning edition of the French newspaper *Le Monde*.⁶³ Pons’s report features accounts from eyewitnesses in Kwangju. On May 21, an article by Henry Scott-Stokes appeared in *The New York Times* covering the political situation in South Korea, and reporting deaths in Kwangju.⁶⁴ Neither Dunning, Scott-Stokes nor Pons had yet reached Kwangju. Further short CBS anchor reports appeared on May 20 and 21 featuring still photographs of the violence.⁶⁵ Shim Jae Hoon’s piece recounting the scenes he had *witnessed* in Kwangju was published in the May 22 early edition of *The New York Times*.⁶⁶ Pons’s second article, featuring his own eye-witness accounts of what he describes as a major “insurrection” in Kwangju, was published in the early edition of *Le Monde* also on May 22.⁶⁷ Hinzpeter’s film appeared on the 8 pm West German ARD television network news programme *Tagesschau* also on May 22.⁶⁸ That same day, Dunning’s eyewitness accounts of the seizure of Kwangju by civilians were broadcast on CBS Evening News – also featuring Hinzpeter’s film. There was therefore a range of reports about the Uprising that appeared in different media – newspapers and television – in different languages, in

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹For Korean reporters’ accounts, see: Scott-Stokes and Lee 2000.

⁶⁰Hinzpeter 2000, p. 68.

⁶¹Hinzpeter 1997, p. 39.

⁶²“Student Demos.” Bruce Dunning Report. *CBS Evening News*. May 19, 1980.

⁶³Pons 1980a.

⁶⁴Scott-Stokes 1980a.

⁶⁵Larson 1990, p. 83.

⁶⁶Shim 1980.

⁶⁷Pons 1980b.

⁶⁸Hinzpeter 2000, p. 71; 5.18 *Hinzpeter Story* 35:34; Lee 2000.

morning editions and evening broadcasts, across different time zones and with some location reports and some journalists reporting from afar. This range of reports has clearly led to confusion and some disagreement concerning who first “broke” the story.

Hinzpeter’s was not the first film of the violence in Kwangju; that accolade goes to Richard Dunning’s CBS report broadcast on May 19. Hinzpeter, however, was the first overseas journalist to have filmed Kwangju *after* the citizens had seized the city, an important implication I discuss below. His images showing that a major insurrection was in process appeared on the same day as Pons’s and Shim’s articles. Which of these reports – Hinzpeter, Pons, Shim – had the greatest impact upon the policy-makers and public opinion of the time? In his recollections, Henry Scott-Stokes claims it was Pons and Shim Jae Hoon who wrote the two articles that “focussed the eyes of the world on Kwangju. Up to this time the South Korean military had pretty much kept a lid on the story.”⁶⁹

Most overseas correspondents faced the same obstacles as Hinzpeter in the production of their stories about Kwangju. Some, like Terry Anderson, faced greater physical threats than Hinzpeter did. If there was a race to break the story of the Kwangju Uprising to the world, as Hinzpeter indicates, Pons, Dunning, Shim and Hinzpeter deserve equal credit; Scott-Stokes believes Pons and Shim merit the accolades. Hinzpeter’s is an important aspect of the story, but not the only part of the history of how news of Kwangju reached the outside world. Why, then, is it that Hinzpeter’s narrative is remembered and celebrated to the *exclusion* of all others?

The Persistence of the Hinzpeter Narrative

The primary reason concerns the influence of research from the original KBS documentary *Blue-Eyed Witness*. In many aspects, Chang Yǒng-ju simplifies Hinzpeter’s own account of his actions in Kwangju for his documentary. Chang does this by removing the tensions and contradictions that fill Hinzpeter’s written recollections of the time. We are left with the impression that Hinzpeter risked his life and defied all odds to get into Kwangju, and only did so through his determination, ingenuity and sympathy for the protestors. This is neither what Hinzpeter’s contradictory written recollections state, nor what the accounts of other correspondents indicate. There are several reasons why Chang altered Hinzpeter’s account for his documentary. First, there is little doubt that the addition of danger and difficulty to Hinzpeter’s story would help enliven the narrative, magnify the scale of his achievements and make the documentary more marketable. However, some of the transformations to Hinzpeter’s story may have begun with simple misunderstandings. In Chang’s 2003 interviews with the journalist, Hinzpeter claims that the situation in Kwangju was “dangerous,” implying danger for the citizens of Kwangju. Did Chang interpret these words as Hinzpeter fearing for his own life?⁷⁰ Neither the interviewee nor the interviewer was a native speaker, so one should not rule out the possibility of misunderstanding. The assertions of threats to Hinzpeter’s life during the Kwangju Uprising may also be related to violence Hinzpeter suffered at the hands of Chun Doo-hwan’s security forces whilst filming the late 1980s period of military rule, a factor discussed below. If this is the case, then it means Chang conflated two historical events from two completely different times, and read threats to Hinzpeter’s life from 1987 back in time to Kwangju 1980.

While the addition of danger to Hinzpeter’s story may have resulted from misunderstandings, the assertion that Hinzpeter was the journalist who played the greatest role in exposing the uprising to the world appears to originate in poor research. *Blue-Eyed Witness* opens with the director visiting libraries and archives in Seoul to inspect censored foreign newspaper coverage of Kwangju. One shot shows a Korean National Assembly Library copy of the May 22 edition of *The New York Times* with Shim Jae Hoon’s lead article on the uprising completely removed from the front cover. In the next shot, Shim’s actual article is superimposed onto the censored version. The point of the scene is to demonstrate the

⁶⁹Scott-Stokes, Shim and Pons 2000, p. 110.

⁷⁰5.18 *Hinzpeter Story* 6:37; 9:05.

effectiveness of Chun's censorship of the media. What is remarkable is that the director makes no other mention of the actual content of Shim's article or those of other journalists, nor does he mention the dates these reports appeared. The claim that Hinzpeter first revealed Kwangju to the world is never justified, examined or explained, it is simply presented as a given. The contributions of Shim and the other journalists are removed from the story of how the first reports of the Kwangju Uprising reached the outside world.

Blue-Eyed Witness appears to have been extremely influential. Following its broadcast on May 18, 2003, Hinzpeter reports receiving greater South Korean media interest and by the end of the year he was awarded the Song Kun-ho Press Award.⁷¹ The subsequent accounts of Hinzpeter's actions appear to cite the narrative created by *Blue-Eyed Witness*. *5.18 Hinzpeter Story* uses identical interview materials from *Blue-Eyed Witness*. The Song Kun-ho Press Award and *A Taxi Driver* borrow the conclusions of *Blue-Eyed Witness* – and emphasize the difficulty and dangers faced by Hinzpeter entering Kwangju. *A Taxi Driver* directly references the Song Kun-ho Press Award. This initial research by Chang both simplifies and enlivens Hinzpeter's narrative, and in doing so creates a somewhat different version of events than the one Hinzpeter produced in his written accounts, and it appears that this version of Hinzpeter's actions has found its way into all subsequent accounts. Overall, some poor research, misunderstandings, misremembered events and the need for a coherent and engaging documentary may have led to the creation of a particular narrative that went on to influence later versions of Hinzpeter's actions, and which has become the most common account presented in authoritative news programmes to the South Korean public.

It is perhaps as a consequence of these changes in the accounts of Hinzpeter's actions at Kwangju that we see a radical realignment in the prominence of Hinzpeter and his role in Kwangju following the 2003 awarding of the Song Kun-ho award and the broadcast of *Blue-Eyed Witness*. Prior to 2003, in the publications *Kwangju in the Eyes of the World: The Personal Recollections of the Foreign Correspondents Covering the Kwangju Uprising* and *5.18 T'ŭkp'awŏn ripotŭ* from 1997, and *The Kwangju Uprising: Eyewitness Accounts of Korea's Tiananmen* from 2000, Hinzpeter is represented as one of many overseas journalists who covered the Kwangju Uprising; after 2003 he is the only one.

While research for *Blue-Eyed Witness* helped shape the basis of the Hinzpeter narrative, *A Taxi Driver* added an additional element: Hinzpeter's relationship with Kim Sa-bok. In the motion picture, the dynamics of Hinzpeter and Kim's relationship shine through as a vital part of the narrative, but Hinzpeter's 1997 account and 2003 interviews for *Blue-Eyed Witness* indicate that their relationship was a minor part of how Hinzpeter originally conceived his own story. In the written transcript of the 2003 award acceptance speech Hinzpeter produced, many people are thanked for their help in getting his report out of Kwangju, but not Kim Sa-bok. However, newspaper reports of the 2003 Song Kun-ho Award ceremony indicate that Hinzpeter went off script and briefly mentioned Kim Sa-bok, thanking him for his help at Kwangju.⁷² Acknowledging Kim appears to have been an afterthought for Hinzpeter in 2003, but this was seized upon by the South Korean media and later developed by the producers of *A Taxi Driver*. The story of a foreign correspondent's film of the Kwangju Uprising required a Korean element to ensure a wider appeal. The Hinzpeter-Kim narrative certainly caught the attention of the media, resulting in numerous articles about the pair, projecting Kim's son Kim Seung-pil [Kim Sŭng-p'il] to prominence,⁷³ and helping market *A Taxi Driver* as an event movie that garnered massive box-office sales. Kim Seung-pil went on to work as a consultant to the *5.18 Hinzpeter Story*, in which details about Kim Sa-bok feature more prominently than in the original documentary. Hinzpeter's relationship with Kim is one feature of the journalist's personal links with Korea, and these links are an important reason for the popularization of his narrative as I discuss below.

Chang's reshaping of the narrative about the reporting of overseas journalists at Kwangju explains how Hinzpeter rose to prominence but not why, neither does it explain why Chang's version of events

⁷¹Hinzpeter 2003.

⁷²Shin 2003.

⁷³Choi 2018.

has gone unchallenged. There appears to be an aura surrounding Hinzpeter that separates him from the other Kwangju correspondents. This aura has emerged because of two factors: the impact of Hinzpeter's images on South Korean democratization and his personal links to the democratization movement.

One reason why Hinzpeter rather than Pons or any other overseas correspondent is celebrated lies in the impact of Hinzpeter's filmed images of citizens' control of Kwangju. Dunning's report from May 19 features images of students battling paratroopers with rocks and tear gas. Much of his footage could have been taken from stock films of violent student clashes with the police that had occurred in South Korea throughout the 1970s and which were generally associated with South Korean politics in the minds of many Western observers.⁷⁴ The final segments of the report show besuited citizens joining the students in the clashes with the paratroopers. The clip provides clear evidence of the gradual transformation of the Kwangju protest from student demonstration into popular uprising. Hinzpeter's footage, however, shows the armed Citizen's Army patrolling the streets after citizens seized control of Kwangju. This marked an important point in South Korean politics because it meant that for a brief period there were effectively two competing governments: the military regime based in Seoul and a citizen-led committee commanding Kwangju and challenging Chun's authority. This state of what Charles Tilly calls "multiple sovereignty" had not existed in South Korea since the Korean War.⁷⁵ Many researchers take this brief five-day period of citizens' control of Kwangju as vital evidence that the Kwangju Uprising was not North Korea inspired mob rule, but an attempt to offer a popular, functioning alternative to military dictatorship. Jung-woon Choi celebrates this as the "absolute community" (chöldae kongdongch'e), George Katsiaficas refers to it as "Liberated Kwangju: The Power of Love".⁷⁶ For both researchers, the period was unquestionable evidence of the participants' democratic and progressive intent. In opposition to what the regime was claiming, anti-authoritarian protestors could mount a viable, functioning alternative. Hinzpeter's film clearly shows citizens as agents of change for democratization – no longer victims, but heroes. As such, his film is consonant with the transformed 1990s memorialization of the uprising.

Hinzpeter's images of the citizens' control of Kwangju greatly influenced the Korean democracy movement between 1981 and 1987. Television footage of the civil unrest was accessible to most South Koreans with a television capable of receiving the US Armed Forces Korea Network (AFKN). Kim and Larsen maintain that many South Korean viewers watched US coverage of the massacre at the time, and even if they did not understand the commentary, they could clearly comprehend the extent of state violence.⁷⁷ The growing use of videocassettes and video technology in South Korea also meant that during the 1980s anti-dictatorship activists could easily reproduce smuggled videotaped film of Kwangju.⁷⁸ Student activists used Hinzpeter's footage to produce anti-regime documentaries on videocassette about Kwangju that were passed amongst activists and shown at clandestine meetings.⁷⁹ These images of the massacre rendered Chun Doo-hwan's attempts to control the media futile.⁸⁰ The film brought the horror of Kwangju to life, providing objective evidence of the corruption, cruelty and illegitimacy of Chun's regime. The images of citizen control also served as a rallying call to later South Korean student leaders.

In comparison to Hinzpeter's vivid images, the newspaper reports of his competitors fared less well. The Chun regime's removal of foreign correspondents' newspaper accounts of Kwangju from libraries meant that few in the South would have known about the overseas reporting of the massacre.⁸¹ Many of these written accounts by overseas correspondents have also been subjected to significant criticism

⁷⁴Larson 1990, p. 80.

⁷⁵Tilly 1975, p. 519.

⁷⁶Choi 2003, p. 4; Katsiaficas 2012, p. 175.

⁷⁷Kim and Larson 1988, p. 88.

⁷⁸Larson 1990, p. 89.

⁷⁹*Blue-Eyed Witness* 51:57.

⁸⁰Kim and Larson 1988, p. 88.

⁸¹*Blue-Eyed Witness* 00:12.

from researchers of the media coverage of Kwangju. Researchers like Larson and Chen, Tenney, and Sung Tae Kim have argued that articles failed to show the arbitrary and disproportionate response of the military authorities, and also reflected contemporary US foreign policy, which favoured security over further democratization.⁸² Even Henry Scott-Stokes, one of the targets for the criticism of researchers over his reporting at Kwangju, is critical of his own use of language in these accounts, referring to it as “grey prose ... [that] diluted the drama.”⁸³ To sum up, the vividness of Hinzpeter’s images still shock because they not only reproduce a very recognizable modern day South Korean cityscape torn apart by military repression but also show a vision of citizens in control – an important source of inspiration for many activists who opposed the military dictatorship. In comparison, the widely criticized prose may have helped relegate the work of Scott-Stokes and Shim from a position of greater recognition.

The criticisms of foreign newspaper reports of Kwangju may explain why Hinzpeter’s competitors have been omitted from the narrative of how the news of the uprising reached the outside world, but it does not mean the journalists deserve to be left out, and it is worth revisiting some of these original reports by Scott-Stokes, Shim and Pons. Examining the information conveyed in Scott-Stokes and Shim’s reports, they make it clear that the first major uprising since the 1960 April Revolution against Syngman Rhee (1875–1965; president 1948–60) is occurring on the peninsula. The articles show that state security services used live ammunition on demonstrators and that this had resulted in civilian and student deaths.⁸⁴ Scott-Stokes points out that indiscriminate attacks on students by paratroopers using bayonets provoked wider violence.⁸⁵ The articles clearly illustrate the widespread opposition to Chun’s rule, popular calls for democratization, as well as systematic repression by the regime.⁸⁶

Philippe Pons’s articles in *Le Monde* also provide a powerful exposé of the massacre.⁸⁷ In his May 22 report, Pons writes:

Kwangju: Three days after the imposition of martial law a major insurrection was taking place in Kwangju. There, since the middle of the night, the demonstrators control the city after extremely murderous confrontations with the army ... At a hospital which we visited, the emergency rooms and operating theaters are proving inadequate to deal with the wounded. Certain of these have been cruelly murdered according to the doctors. According to demonstrators, the number of dead has risen to 100. We saw some 70 others extremely badly injured, mostly with bullet wounds.⁸⁸

Pons’s article used no harsh symbolic terms to describe the demonstrators, avoided reliance on official sources, was direct in his description of the popular anger and clearly identified Pons himself as a witness to the state massacre of civilians.⁸⁹ Why Pons has not received greater recognition for his reporting at Kwangju is unclear, but it may be because unlike Hinzpeter’s film, his descriptions show the participants as victims of repression rather than heroic agents of change, and his contribution consequently has been ignored in the light of the shifting understandings of Kwangju since the 1990s.

A second reason why Hinzpeter is celebrated over other journalists may lie in the actions of overseas journalists in South Korea both during and following the uprising. This is particularly true of the contrast between the more nebulous political actions of some of Hinzpeter’s competitors during and post-Kwangju and the personal, political and emotional connections developed by Hinzpeter to South

⁸²See critical analysis of Kwangju newspaper coverage in Larson 1990, p. 86; Larson and Chen 1992, p. 96; Kim 2000, pp. 25–31; and Tenney 1992, p. 59, p. 62.

⁸³Scott-Stokes, Shim and Pons 2000, p. 109.

⁸⁴Scott-Stokes 1980a.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁸⁶Shim 1980; Scott-Stokes 1980a.

⁸⁷Scott-Stokes, Shim and Pons 2000, p. 109.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 109–10; Pons 1980b.

⁸⁹Kim 2000.

Korea and its democratization movement. There is significant testimonial evidence that overseas reporters went beyond the normal demands of their role as journalists in two key incidents that indirectly impacted US–ROK foreign relations over Kwangju. On two occasions, in the afternoon of May 26 and in the early hours of May 27, Yun Sang-wŏn, the leader of the radical faction of the Kwangju settlement committee, asked journalist Henry Scott-Stokes to contact the US Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, William Gleysteen, to intervene on behalf of the people of Kwangju, and persuade the military authorities in Seoul to “halt the bloodshed.”⁹⁰ Yun was trying to persuade senior US Government representatives to force a negotiated and bloodless surrender of the city and avoid a massacre by the military authorities. Scott-Stokes claims that because all the phone lines out of Kwangju were cut, he could not telephone the US Embassy directly, and would therefore inform the Ambassador indirectly via the media. He sent both the story and Yun Sang-wŏn’s appeal with his colleague Shim Jae Hoon, who left Kwangju and phoned the report to *The New York Times*.⁹¹

In his memoirs, William Gleysteen claims that he received a request via the media to intervene and help mediate a truce:

Rather than try to contact me, he [Henry Scott-Stokes] passed it indirectly through the copy he was filing to New York. The story surfaced the same evening in a newscast from our own armed forces station [AFKN] around 10 p.m., and I first heard of it around 11 p.m. *after I had been officially informed that Korean forces would re-enter Kwangju within two or three hours.* ... I was certain I could not succeed because Korean troops were already authorized and poised to move into Kwangju. So I declined the request ... At the time, the decision tugged at my conscience. [Emphasis added by author].⁹²

It is odd that Shim was able to phone his story directly to New York but not relay the student appeal to the US Embassy in Seoul. It is equally unclear why Scott-Stokes did not make a greater effort to contact Gleysteen himself. It is ultimately uncertain whether a timelier and more direct request from the foreign correspondents for the US embassy to intervene would have prevented the loss of life that resulted from the taking of the city. Gleysteen himself is ambiguous in his recollections, claiming on the one hand that he “did not want to blight any serious peace initiative ...” and on the other that he felt he had made the “right decision” in ignoring the indirect request, since he considered the student leader Yun to be a hardliner incapable of “compromise.”⁹³ However, Scott-Stokes was in a unique position to intervene, and perhaps could have done more to contribute to a less violent outcome. This may explain why the turn of events played on Scott-Stokes’s conscience, as he indicates in his written account: “The wrong side had won [the military]. We had not lifted a finger to protect them [the hardline faction crushed in the military re seizure of Kwangju].”⁹⁴

Overseas correspondents were involved in a more controversial incident in the months that followed the suppression of Kwangju – one which may have helped solidify Chun Doo-hwan’s grip on power. On August 8, 1980, Terry Anderson and Sam Jameson, two journalists who had reported the massacre, interviewed John Wickham, Commander of Combined Force Command,⁹⁵ and asked him whether the US Government would support Chun Doo-hwan “were he to successfully consolidate his power and become president of the ROK.”⁹⁶ Wickham replied he would, provided Chun came to power “legitimately” and demonstrated a “broad base of support from the Korean people.”⁹⁷ Wickham admits in his memoirs that he was breaking standard protocol to announce US foreign policy, but

⁹⁰Scott-Stokes, Shim and Pons 2000, p. 115.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 112–13.

⁹²Gleysteen 1999, p. 140.

⁹³*Ibid.*

⁹⁴Scott-Stokes, Shim and Pons 2000, p. 114.

⁹⁵The overall head of armed forces in South Korea.

⁹⁶Wickham 1999, pp. 155–56.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 156.

claims he thought the interview was “off the record”.⁹⁸ Anderson and Jameson subsequently shared the recording with Scott-Stokes who breached journalistic ethics by playing the tape to Chun Doo-hwan during an interview the following day. Chun saw the recording as clear evidence of US support for his coup. According to Wickham, US State officials were incensed by Wickham’s statement, which contradicted the official position to limit support for Chun.⁹⁹ On August 27, Chun became president, not through direct democratic elections but via his blatantly undemocratic electoral college system. Mark Petersen argues that Chun deliberately exploited “mistakes” made by Wickham and other US officials to take power.¹⁰⁰ It is unclear whether Scott-Stokes, Anderson and Jameson unwittingly helped Chun consolidate power by breaching confidentiality in their search for a scoop, or whether their desire for a story merely hastened the inevitable US support for Chun. What is clear is that the actions of Scott-Stokes and other journalists appear far murkier in comparison to Hinzpeter’s post-Kwangju involvement in South Korea.

In the years after Kwangju, Hinzpeter developed a more personal connection to South Korea thanks to his coverage of the democratization movement. It is this connection – as well as the way in which Hinzpeter’s interest has been popularly perceived – that has helped secure his legacy. The documentaries *Blue-Eyed Witness* and *5.18 Hinzpeter Story*, as well as the Song Kun-ho Press Award citation reveal that throughout the 1980s, Hinzpeter frequently returned to South Korea to report on political events, particularly the democratization movement. He travelled to film the inauguration of Chun Doo-hwan as president in late 1980 and returned to Kwangju. The West German TV documentary that Hinzpeter produced using this footage, *SüdKorea am Scheideweg* [*South Korea at the Crossroads*], made it clear that Chun’s route to office was stained by the blood of Kwangju’s civilians. Hinzpeter also filmed the house arrest of prominent pro-democracy campaigner and future president Kim Young-sam (1927–2015; president 1993–98). In November 1986, while filming an attack by plain-clothed policemen on opposition politicians on the streets of Seoul, Hinzpeter was himself subjected to a prolonged and brutal assault by the South Korean police and hospitalized. Injuries to his spine were so severe that he required constant surgical intervention, and was eventually forced to give up full-time work.¹⁰¹ His injuries were not just physical but psychological. In a 2017 interview featured in *5.18 Hinzpeter Story*, Hinzpeter’s wife reports that her husband frequently suffered flashbacks to Kwangju, waking up from nightmares that he was under attack by South Korean troops.¹⁰² This leads director Chang Yŏng-ju to exclaim: “I had no idea he had suffered so much mentally and psychologically.” For Chang, it was the suffering he endured as a result of his 1986 attack by the Seoul police that mark him out.

The Hinzpeter Narrative and the Ongoing Struggle over the Memorialization of Kwangju

Hinzpeter’s sacrifices suggest an important connection between Hinzpeter and Chang, which the director highlights in *5.18 Hinzpeter Story*. With a background of Hinzpeter’s filmed footage of students battling police in 1980s Seoul, Chang’s commentary states that he had been part of the anti-dictatorship movement himself, a fact that prompted him to remake *Blue-Eyed Witness* more than fifteen years later reusing his own filmed footage. This was more than cashing in on the success of *A Taxi Driver*. Chang had a personal link to the Hinzpeter story, was involved in the student movement, and was able to develop a friendship with Hinzpeter who he felt was on the side of the 1980s protestors.

Hinzpeter’s post-Kwangju actions distinguish him from other journalists. He wasn’t a journalist working for newspapers like *The New York Times*, subsequently criticized by media researchers for supporting US foreign policy objectives of favouring security over democratization. Neither was

⁹⁸*Ibid.*

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰Petersen 1987, p. 63.

¹⁰¹Hinzpeter 2000, p. 76; Lee Sang-hee 2003.

¹⁰²*5.18 Hinzpeter Story* 1:25:07.

Hinzpeter interviewing dictators or senior US officials like his counterparts at Kwangju. He is untainted by association with the geopolitical forces widely blamed by the anti-dictatorship movement for the carnage at Kwangju.¹⁰³ In the years after Kwangju he stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the movement as both hero and victim: hero of the cause of Korean democratization and victim of the military dictatorship. Chang juxtaposes the discussion of Hinzpeter's injuries and of the journalist's desire to be interred at Mangwŏn Dong Cemetery in Kwangju, implying that Hinzpeter's wish was justified by his traumatic experiences.

There is in *5.18 Hinzpeter Story* a sense of unfinished business, that by remaking his own film, Chang is not only expressing his fondness for a man he knew, he is also using Hinzpeter's story as a weapon in an ongoing political fight to preserve the memory of Kwangju for what it meant during his activist days of the 1980s. Kwangju is still a site of contestation in South Korean politics. This is also evident from ongoing legal cases against conservative commentators who allege Kwangju citizens acted as *agents provocateurs* sent by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).¹⁰⁴ As recently as February 2019, three lawmakers in the South Korean National Assembly were accused of defaming victims of the uprising by describing them as "monsters" and DPRK operatives.¹⁰⁵ Some see such allegations as evidence of a wider political fight in South Korean politics between those who largely support what they see as the developmental legacy of South Korean post-1945 dictatorships and those who celebrate the actions of the anti-authoritarian movement in securing democracy. The latter group see Kwangju as a vital and enduring symbol of this movement. In May 2016, the *Hankyoreh* newspaper reported an increasing number of calls for the institution of a new law against "democratic uprising denial" for those who make conspiracy allegations against participants in the uprising.¹⁰⁶ Researchers at the May 18 Institute, a think tank dedicated to investigating and memorializing the uprising, argue that there is a "state level manipulation of symbols" about Kwangju. One researcher, Cha Jong-su, claimed that it was incumbent upon the Ministry of Defence to deny allegations that DPRK operatives provoked the uprising, since this ministry alone has access to records from the period. Professor Oh Seung-yong [Sŭng-yong] of Chŏnnam National University believes these attacks on the legacy of Kwangju are aimed at "stripping away the legitimacy of post-Cold War reform administrations of Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003), Roh Moo-hyun and restoring the legitimacy of the Cold War reactionary administrations from Syng-man Rhee to Park Chung-hee (1961–1979) and Chun Doo-hwan."¹⁰⁷ Oh's argument is important because he perceives allegations of DPRK involvement to be more than attacks by right-wing extremists on the participants of a historical event; they are serious assaults on democratically elected political administrations associated with what he believes are progressive politics.¹⁰⁸ By defending the legacy of its participants, Oh uses the memory of Kwangju as a tool in a struggle to defend progressives against reactionary forces.

Kwangju is more than just a historical event; how it is remembered either as a struggle for democracy or as the work of North Korean sympathisers or as something else has come to differentiate between radically distinct positions on the South Korean political spectrum. Challenging the most recent and accepted understanding of the Kwangju Uprising as a key struggle in a democratization process with accusations of DPRK intervention is seen by those on one side of the spectrum as an attack not only on the victims of Kwangju but on the historical legacy of progressive governments, and on a political identity.

¹⁰³Correspondents who covered Kwangju largely sympathized with the protestors. See Martin 1997.

¹⁰⁴Jung 2016b.

¹⁰⁵Park 2019.

¹⁰⁶Jung 2016b.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸Both Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun were known for their stance on human rights.

Conclusion

As Cha Jong-su states, the opening of the Ministry of Defence archives would help draw a permanent line under the politically motivated accusations of DPRK collusion by offering evidence about what the military authorities knew about the security situation, the alleged existence of North Korean operatives and the actions of the security forces. While these and other state records remain closed, eyewitness evidence of the uprising will remain vital, and as a result, the ill-tempered exchanges over North Korean collusion are likely to continue. The Hinzpeter narrative stands at the zenith of foreign correspondents' accounts because of his personal connections to South Korea, his sympathies for the anti-dictatorship movement, and his friendship with Korean taxi driver Kim Sa-bok. More than anything else, Hinzpeter's record of the moment the citizens took control of Kwangju provides evidence of the protestors' democratic and progressive intent.

The Hinzpeter narrative is important for two further reasons. First, the narrative helps support the vision of a progressive struggle at Kwangju. Hinzpeter's role as star witness has proved vital to the defence of this political identity in modern South Korean politics, so much so that his burial at Mangwŏn Dong Cemetery represents a virtual canonization, a statement that his testimony is inviolable. Paul Cohen states that myths are "symbolic representations designed less to elucidate the past ... than to draw energy from it."¹⁰⁹ Hinzpeter is a journalist worth remembering because he has reinvigorated the memorialization of Kwangju for members of the activist generation such as Chang.

Second, there is a deeper historical question underlying the Hinzpeter narrative concerning the process through which historical narratives become generally accepted and lodged in the collective consciousness as the accepted view of what happened in the past. Is there a point at which one historical narrative is no longer valued and another, contrary view is accepted in its place? The origins of the Hinzpeter narrative can be traced back to a single origin – Chang's first documentary. But the creation of a specific version of events by a single author was only the first stage in the dissemination of a historical narrative that appeared in different forms (documentaries, commercial film, articles) that were created by different groups (*Hankyoreh* journalists, filmmakers and TV reporters). All these voices have shaped a narrative that has developed, in that it has acquired elements that were less prevalent in the original, for example Kim Sa-bok's role. What links these disparate groups is a shared historical understanding of what Kwangju should mean. An alternative version of the correspondent's story exists in the 1997 *5.18 T'ŭkp'awŏn ripotŭ* and other publications, which show Hinzpeter as one of many journalists valiantly struggling to get news of the Kwangju Uprising out to the world. However, the Hinzpeter narrative has probably become too established and intertwined with issues of the identity of an entire political community to be challenged now.

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¹⁰⁹Cohen 1997, p. xiii.

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