

National and International Protests Challenge Naval Base Construction on Jeju Island, South Korea

samedi 3 septembre 2011, par [GWON Gwisook](#) (Date de rédaction antérieure : 15 août 2011).

Sommaire

- [The Navy, Samsung, and the \(...\)](#)
- [Opposition Parties vs the \(...\)](#)
- [The Pro-construction Organizat](#)

Tension heightened in Gangjeong village on August 14 when the protestors learned that 500-600 policemen, 16 police buses, 10 vehicles with suppression gear including 3 water cannons were dispatched from the mainland. The protestors responded by confirming their determination to protect their village (*Headline Jeju*, August 14, 2011)

Meanwhile, the navy announced that it was proceeding with construction in a land area of 489,000 square meters with an investment of 9.8 trillion won. It stated that 14% of the work has already been completed at a cost of 1.4 trillion won (Kyunghyang.com, July 25, 2011). At this writing, peace activist, Choi Sung-hee remains in prison,¹ and some 40 protestors have been charged with obstruction and fined 50 million won (*The Hankyoreh*, July 26, 2011). In addition to applying for an injunction against 77 protestors, the navy and Samsung C & T claimed 290 million won in compensation for damages by 14 protestors.

The Navy, Samsung, and the Police Crack Down

Following an arrest on July 16 and a visit by the national police chief on July 21, about 300 policemen have been stationed at the entrance to Jungdeok (*Jeju sori*, July 25, 2011). The chief called for rigorous enforcement in the event that construction is obstructed (*Jeju Sori*, July 21, 2011). Within a week, the national maritime police chief echoed the same order during his visit to Segwipo, in Jeju (*Headline Jeju*, July 27, 2011).

The villagers and support organizations criticized government abuse and announced an all-out fight to protect the village and the peace (*Jeju sori*, July 25, 2011). Since then, chained protestors have guarded the entrance to Jungdeok, and other protestors have stayed in the protestors' tent through the night.

On August 8, some 200 policemen blocked residents who tried to repair equipment in Jungdeok such as tents destroyed by typhoon Muifa. After a one-hour verbal confrontation with residents, the police moved back to the street (*Headline Jeju*, August 8, 2011). However, the next day they returned with the navy to prevent residents from bringing vinyl and other materials to the site. They arrested one activist for obstructing a police officer and assault (*Headline Jeju*, August 9, 2011).² The village chief criticized the navy for isolating activists in Jungdeok from villagers, and called for continued

resistance against the crackdown.

While the navy and the police used force to stop the protests, the navy and/or Samsung C & T enforced another law over the last three months, accusing the protestors of impeding performance of duty. This provision was even more stressful for villagers precisely because it was so vague. One resident noted that a photographer taking pictures of the scene and a car owner who parked near the construction site were accused of obstruction of business. Another resident added that the law always sided with the navy and/or Samsung. They described this situation as re-enactment of the 4.3 massacre of 1948 : “all kinds of complaints and accusations and fines are killing us this time instead of guns at that time.”

Conservative vs Liberal Media : ‘Pro-North Korea Forces’ vs Peace Forces

While physical clashes occurred around Gangjeong, ideological clashes erupted in the national media. Conservative media re-emphasized the necessity to build the naval base and attacked activists as ‘pro-North Korea leftists’ (Chosun.com, July 20, 2011).³ A leader of the Grand National Party, the ruling party, used the same words in the national assembly, demanding strict enforcement by the authorities (*Sisa Jeju*, July 27, 2011). Pro-construction organizations in an August 5 rally likewise attacked the pro-North Korea force. The label ‘leftist’ or ‘communist’ had often been used to suppress opposition views during earlier authoritarian regimes.

By contrast, liberal media criticized the integration of US and ROK defense systems while giving voice to the protestors (*Pressian*, July 29, 2011 ; *Hankyoreh* 21, August 5, 2011). Moreover, these media interviewed outside supporters (*The Hankyoreh*, July 29). They found that these supporters were ordinary citizens, artists, researchers or members of civil organizations who were concerned with peace. Three recent articles in The New York Times conveyed the views of anti-base forces, disseminating the issue worldwide.⁴ Even CNN introduced the “Save Jeju Island” petition when it interviewed Gloria Steinem on August 12.

Opposition Parties vs the Government ; Reconsidering Construction vs. Keeping Construction

On July 29, the mayor of Segwipo city accepted a government order to block the only path to enter Jungdeok. Seoul pressured the Jeju government with warnings of administrative and financial penalties for almost a year (*The Hankyoreh*, July 29, 2011). The Jeju governor, however, has remained quiet about the base project.⁵

With a general election and a presidential election coming in April and December next year respectively, the political parties have begun to raise the issue of the base. On August 4, the five opposition political parties called for a temporary halt in construction pending a full review by the national assembly. Immediately after their call, however, the Ministry of National Defense announced that it would push ahead with construction for national security and budget reasons. The Ministry denied again that the base was an outpost of the US military defense system (*Jeju Sori*, August 4, 2011).

The Democratic Party, the main opposition party, reached an agreement with the Grand National Party to convene a subcommittee to examine the construction budget, but it failed to obtain a temporary halt in construction. Finally, on August 11, a few members of the ruling Grand National Party visited to assess the situation in Gangjeong. The base will be an issue in the coming elections.

The Pro-construction Organizations vs the Protestors : Pushing ahead with Construction vs Terminating Construction project

Pro-construction villagers and their support organizations have issued public statements or held demonstrations in the course of the conflict. However, for the first time, on August 5, they held a large demonstration near the construction site. Some 400 supporters of construction demanded moving ahead with construction in the interest of national security and safeguarding peace. Supporters were from the Korea Veteran Association, the Navy Veteran Association and other conservative associations (*Sisa Jeju*, August 5, 2011). Their banners criticized the outside supporters as “pro-North Korea garbage”. After the rally, they tried to march to Jungdeok, but 500 police blocked them to prevent clashes.

While pro-construction villagers gained outside support, 6 anti-construction villagers also won additional support. Father Moon Jeong-hyun, a leading exponent of the anti base movement in Pyeongtaek, moved to Gangjeong in July.

Catholic priests in Jeju parish have stayed in the tents of Jungdeok to block a sudden police action since July 25. Jeju parish also held mass in Jungdeok with about 1,000 believers on August 11 (*Jeju Sori*, August 11, 2011). Moreover, Gwangju parish, Korean YMCA, the Korean Teachers & Education Workers’ Union, WILPF (Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom), Christian Conference of Asia, and others expressed solidarity with the villagers. The Global Campaign to Save Jeju Island was formed with a Website.

On August 6, anti-construction villagers and supporters held a 2nd rally calling for an end to the plan to construct the base. About 800 participants came from throughout the nation. Most were ordinary citizens including a circle of culture and arts, members of civil organizations, and villagers. This time, leaders of opposition parties played a prominent role⁷ during the two-hour rally. In positioning for the elections, each side emphasizes the search for peace, but the logic of the two is diametrically opposite.

With the development of the movement, a change has occurred in the collective identity and rituals of the protestors. A young villager told me that he had gained understanding of the older generation since struggling together. After learning about the history of the community, he came to identify strongly as a member of it. He and other villagers express strong determination to preserve their community for future generations.

Meanwhile, outside supporters have come from all over the mainland and even outside the country. Some came to Jungdeok to support Gangjeong villagers from the start, but others reported that they became engaged after discovering the beauty of the seaside, the suffering of villagers, or the possibility of communal living. The result is that the collective identity of the protestors is changing from the solidarity of rage in 2007 to communal solidarity.

Along with new types of support, the rituals of the anti-construction groups become more diversified. As seen in the 2nd rally on August 6, songs, dances and plays constituted a large part of the demonstration.

The candlelight vigils every evening in front of the construction site show a similar pattern. The Gangjeong café, the center for communication, posted comic films and an ad for inviting mainlanders to spend their summer holiday camping in Jungdeok. Visitors and supporters spent their time walking, talking, or erecting towers with small stones. While some are still chained and Choi Sung-hee is again on a hunger strike in prison, demonstrators are creating softer, life-affirming

means to vitalize the movement.

In this update, I have attempted to suggest a change of discourses, actors, collective identity, and rituals over the last month. After the entrance to Jungdeok was closed, the sense of urgency has grown. At this writing, tension has mounted around the village while participation and support have increased for both sides, leading to a slight change of collective identity and rituals among the protestors.

August 6, 2011 update : Gloria Steinem, *Arms Race Intrudes on a South Korean Paradise* (NYT)

See : [South Korea: The Arms Race Intrudes on Paradise](#) (ESSF, article 22752).

August 5, 2011 update :

On July 22, the ROK national police chief came to Jeju Island. Two days later, around 100 police bearing riot shields were sent to Gangjeong to guard the entrances to Jungdeok, the intended naval base site and home of protesting villagers. In defiance of a July 15, 2011 government directive, protesters obstructed two entrances to the site, using a car blockade at one and locked arms at the other. Following verbal confrontation, the riot police left without resorting to physical violence.

On July 25, two additional Korean political opposition leaders, Democratic Party member Kim Jae Yun, who represents Seogwipo (the city that encompasses the southern half of Jeju including Gangjeong), and Korean Democratic Labor Party member Hyun Ae Ja, joined the protestors. Both issued solidarity statements at press conferences ; Hyun chained herself to a tree and joined the human blockade.

Mayor Kang Dong-Kyun and Brother Song Kang-Ho have been released ; however Ko Kwan Il, artist Sung-Hee Choi, and nine other activists remain imprisoned without bail, while awaiting trial. The 77 activists and civil service organizations were given one week from July 15 to leave the Jungdeok coast ; however the directive has not been implemented pending judicial review by Seogwipo City.

On Aug. 2, Korean activists reported that Gangjeong villagers and their supporters have blocked all the construction entrances to the intended naval base site (and the former homes and farms of the villagers).

The villagers have two demands : stop construction and initiate a new assessment process to determine the necessity for the base ; provide a thorough environmental impact statement (EIS) in accord with Korean law.

The five ROK opposition political parties are supporting these demands. On Aug. 4, they held a joint press conference stating that the destruction of the coastline for naval construction would damage the environment and that the National Assembly should reconsider the project.

Leading Korean Catholic bishops are regularly visiting the village and holding mass on the disputed coastline. Catholic priests, nuns, and monks are among those who have been arrested during nonviolent demonstrations.

On August 6 a large protest rally is scheduled to be held on Jeju.

Meanwhile, Gangjeong landowners are awaiting adjudication of their Supreme Court appeal challenging the legality of ROK military destruction of a national monument protection area (Jeju's southern coast received this designation from the Korean Cultural Heritage Administration in 2001). Jeju District Court dismissed their suit, finding that the landowners lacked standing to bring the

case. A decision to appeal is expected within the year.

A growing number of public intellectuals worldwide, including Noam Chomsky, Richard Levins, and George Katsiaficas, have expressed support for the villagers.

See the Save Jeju Island website administered by Matt Hoey, an aerospace nuclear weapons analyst now in Jeju Island, which posts regular news updates.

July 16 update : ROK Police Arrest Peaceful Gangjeong Anti-Base Activists

In tactics reminiscent of the darkest days of the dictatorship, ROK undercover police officers have arrested three leading activists in the anti-base movement in Jeju's Gangeong village : Mayor Kang Dong-kyun, Brother Song Kang-ho, and base opposition leader Ko Kwon-il. The three face up to five-year sentences and heavy fines.

The arrest came in the wake of international support for the protest movement in the form of a widely circulated letter by including a letter of support from American feminist and political activist Gloria Steinem, and the launch of an English-language website and online petition supported by over 100 peace and religious groups worldwide.

The South Korean Navy and Minister of Justice Lee Gui Nam also issued a notice warning 77 individuals and civil society organizations of dire consequences for impeding construction of the naval base.

* * *

See also : [Protests Challenge Naval Base Construction on Jeju Island, South Korea: Hunger Strike Precipitates a National and International Movement](#) (ESSF article 22310).

Notes

1 Ko Kwan-il was released on bail on August 9.

2 The police reported that he was booked but not detained on August 10 (Headline Jeju, August 10).

3 According to Yeo, referring to the supporters as an "outside force" was a government strategy to separate them from villagers in the anti-base movement in Pyeongtaek. See Andrew Yeo, "Back to the Future : Korean Anti-base Resistance from Jeju Island to Pyeongtaek", the Asia-Pacific Journal v.9, Issue 32 No 3, August 8, 2011.

4 All three writers, Christine Ahn, an executive director of Korean Policy Institute (August 5, 2011), Gloria Steinem (August 6, 2011), and Xiao Ling from Singapore (August 10, 2011), urged a halt to the militarization of Jeju Island for peace and life in Jeju and throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

5 The Jeju Council has scheduled a conflict resolution meeting for August 16-18 (Headline Jeju, August 12, 2011)

6 According to residents, only seven pro-base villagers showed up for the rally and some participants were mobilized by the government.

7 Among political leaders, Back Ki-wan, a prominent activist from the 60's, Jung Dong-young, a presidential candidate of the Democratic Party in 2007, and Kwon Young-gil, a presidential candidate of the Democratic Labor Party both in 2002 and in 2007, and members of national

- assembly showed up. Jung Dong-young mentioned the potential military conflicts between China and the USA, and promised to construct a peace park in Gangjeong, not the naval base.
- 8 This film was made by Jane Jin Kaisen and Guston Sondin-Kung. Jane is an independent Danish filmmaker. Kim Min-Su (a young Gangjeong villager) filmed the footage of Yang's arrest. The film was posted on Vimeo on May 21, and on Youtube on May 24, 2011.
- 9 Cha, Kyoungeun, "Jeju and a Naval Arms Race in Asia", Institute of Policy Studies, June 18, 2010 ; Uooksik Jung, "Oh ! Peace", Pressian, May 17, 2011.
- 10 See Cha, Kyoungeun, *ibid.*
- 11 Bruce Gagnon, co-coordinator and co-founder of 'the Global Network against Weapons and Nuclear power in Space', is a leading peace activist. He started a hunger strike for solidarity with Yang Yoon-mo on May 24. See space4peace.blogspot.com.
- 12 Johnston, Hank, 1995, "A Methodology for Frame Analysis", in Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (eds.), *Social Movements and Culture*, Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, p. 218.
- 13 Taylor, Verta and Nancy Whittier, 1995, "Analytical Approaches to Social Movement Culture", in Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (eds), *ibid.*
- 14 Jeju residents have pursued peace and human rights as their vision for the Island since suffering from 'the Jeju 4.3 massacre'. About 30,000, over 10% of the population, died or missing during 1948-1953, and the trauma has remained until today. See *Jeju Weekly*, March-May, 2011.
- 15 The survey was designed to poll opinions of residents living in each administrative district with which the particular village was affiliated. As a result, opinions of the affected villages were largely ignored.
- 16 The population of Gangjeong village was about 1,900, and eligible voters were about 1,400 according to resident registration as of 2007. However, the expected total number of votes was about 1, 050 since about 350 voters were not in the area at the time (*Oh My News*, November 13, 2007).
- 17 Previous research also noted this transition of discourse. See Cho Sung-youn, 2008, "From an Island of Suffering to an Island of Peace", *Yoksabipyoun*, no. 82.
- 18 The ritual of shaving the head is a popular act showing strong determination of protesters and a means to strengthen solidarity in Korean society.
- 19 See the internet café of the Gangjeong village. See the internet café of the Gangjeong village.
- 20 This blog is owned by Choi Sung-hee, a peace activist. She tried to block a construction truck by lying down just in front of a truck, and twice participated in a solidarity fast along with Yang after her arrest on May 20, 2011. She remains in jail at this writing.
- 21 Snow, David and Robert Benford, 1992, "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest", in Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds.), *Frontiers in social Movement Theory*, New Haven : Yale University Press.

P.-S.

* Recommended citation : Gwisook Gwon, Protests Challenge Naval Base Construction on Jeju Island, South Korea : Hunger Strike Precipitates a National and International Movement, The Asia-Pacific Journal Vol 9, Issue 33 No 2, August 15, 2011. [Update, August 14, 2011]
<http://japanfocus.org/-Gwisook-Gwon/3589>

* Gwisook Gwon is a lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Jeju National University on Jeju Island. Her book, The Politics of Memory, a study of the Jeju 4.3 uprising, was designated an excellent book of the year 2007 by The National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Korea.

* I am very grateful to Sung-youn Cho, Douglas Hansen, Heonik Kwon, and Mark Selden for constructive comments.