

## Special Session.

### Reflection and Vision on the Foundation's International Solidarity Project

Since 1994, the Foundation has been conducting various projects to inherit the May 18 Spirit. Especially the foundation started international affairs projects and has made an effort to globalize the May 18 Uprising and enhance democracy, human rights, and peace in the world. To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Foundation, we will look at the past international programs and explore the direction of the Foundation's international projects in the future. This session is organized in collaboration with <Memory Record Healing Cooperative>, which conducted a research project on compiling the International projects' documents and how to develop the Foundation's international projects in 2023.

**Moderator** Mr. Kim Jae-hyung (Korea National Open University)

#### **Speakers**

1. Outcome and Challenges of the Foundation's International Projects  
Memory Record Healing Cooperative
2. Experience of the International Project  
Don Tajaroensuk (People's Empowerment Foundation)
3. Transitional and Direction of the International Solidarity Projects  
of the May 18 Foundation  
Jung Ho-Gi (Woosuk University)



## International Programs of the May 18 Memorial Foundation: Key Achievements and Challenges

Yang Ra-Yun, Lee So-Yeong, Lim Jeong-Seob  
Memory Record Healing Cooperative

### 1. Intro

The May 18 Memorial Foundation (the Foundation) is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. The Foundation was established to “commemorate, inherit and develop the movement for resistance and the sublime spirit of solidarity,”<sup>43)</sup> and it has implemented various projects to carry out this mission. Currently, the Foundation’s main projects are divided into seeking the truth, countering distortions, conducting research on the May 18 uprising, promoting education and cultural initiatives, and strengthening international solidarity. The Foundation’s international programs have been in full swing since the 2000s, and the activities and achievements have become the main programs of the Foundation. It is especially commendable that the Foundation is taking the initiative at the private level, despite the regional limitations of Gwangju and the network and support needed to implement such programs. It is, therefore, necessary to understand how the Foundation has promoted the May 18 spirit across the globe by engaging in diverse international initiatives, establishing itself as a prominent organization and overcoming various challenges.

Today, the changing global environment surrounding democracy has not only affected democracy in Korea but also led to greater demand for civil society to advocate for international democracy. For example, the recent pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong, Thailand, and Myanmar have recalled the May 18 Movement of 40 years ago, asking for Gwangju’s participation and support to promote democracy across the globe. Therefore, it is necessary to identify new agendas and explore active responses that reflect the new environment and conditions of global democracy. Also, there are new entities in the region implementing international programs relating to May 18, which is another reason the Foundation should review its programs to avoid engaging in similar or overlapping initiatives. In 2023, the department in charge of international programs at the Foundation was changed from “International Solidarity Department” to “Glocal Center,” to prepare for the way forward. And to this end, the Foundation reviewed and organized its materials on existing programs, during which process the research team was able to examine the Foundation’s 30-year journey on international initiatives.

This paper will look back at the practical efforts and achievements, as well as discussing the future direction of its international programs by reviewing them one by one. First, the paper will cover the overall flow of the Foundation’s initiatives

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43) The Founding Statement of the May 18 Memorial Foundation. August 30, 1994.

on promoting the May 18 spirit across the globe, and then review the programs currently in place by categories to identify key achievements and implications.

## 2. Formation and Development of May 18 International Programs

The international programs of the Foundation have had many turning points over the past 30 years. Various programs have been initiated and stopped, and adjusted or transformed. The formation and flow of these programs can be categorized into three stages as shown below:

<Figure> Development Stages of the May 18 Foundation's International Programs



### ◎ Initial Stage (1994 – 2004)

The May 18 globalization efforts<sup>44)</sup> began with the works of the Gwangju Citizens' Solidarity on Restoring Honor to the May Uprising Victims (the Solidarity). This Solidarity was established to check on the May 18 Commemoration Project initiated unilaterally by the government, and the Solidarity sought to engage with other countries with similar experiences in the process. The International Symposium on Overseas Perspectives on May 18 was held in 1994, followed by the International Symposium on Crimes Against Humanity and Settlement in 1995, and the first international youth camp in 1996. This established an international network. In 1998, the Asian Human Charter was declared in Gwangju under the leadership of the Solidarity and the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) to commemorate the May 18 Gwangju Uprising. This led to tangible accomplishments for the globalization of the May 18 spirit, and this idea was expanded to the universal concepts of democracy, human rights, and peace.

The Solidarity's achievements on the globalization of May 18 were later followed by the Foundation's international projects and solidarity activities. First, the financial resources were prepared as the Ordinance to Support the Basic Property of the Gwangju May 18 Memorial Foundation was enacted in 1997, and the May 18 Victims' Fund, which had been managed by Gwangju City, was transferred to

44) Nationwide and worldwide promotion of May 18 had been long-standing challenges to prevent this historical event from becoming a localized or isolated event in a specific area. While nationwide and worldwide diffusion models are commonly adopted, the globalization of May 18 was a strategy chosen as a detour because nationalization of May 18 was difficult.

the Foundation in 1998. In 2000, a large international event was planned in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the May 18 Uprising, and staff were assigned to handle this event. In 2002, the Foundation's Articles of Incorporation established the basis<sup>45)</sup> to engage in international programs, making Gwangju-Asia Human Rights Solidarity Project more concrete. A key example was the Gathering of the Families and Organizations of Victims of Democracy in Asia, held from 1999 to 2003, which was expanded to the Solidarity Gathering of the Family Network of Victims of Democracy in Asia in 2001 and to the Gwangju International Peace Camp in 2004. In 2005, the Foundation started hosting the Gwangju Asian Human Rights School for international civil society activists, laying the foundation for Gwangju to become a city for human rights and peace in Asia. This initial stage is when the Foundation set up the budgetary and institutional basis for international programs by hosting international projects that had previously been organized by civil society organizations (CSOs).

### ◎ Growth Period (2005 – 2014)

The international programs of the Foundation reached a turning point in 2005 when it secured state funding under Article 5 of the Special Act on the May 18 Democratization Movement. The international programs were assigned under the Gwangju Democracy, Human Rights and Peace Project, and the International Cooperation Department was established in the Foundation's secretariat to handle international programs. The department was subsequently reorganized into the International Cooperation Team (2006), Exchange Support Team (2008), and Exchange and Solidarity Team (2011) to build its international expertise, engage in more exchange programs, and strengthen international solidarity.

In terms of programs, this is when the Foundation tries to expand and reorganize the existing programs, and explore new ones. First, the Gwangju International Peace Camp was renamed the Gwangju International Peace Forum (2007) and then the Gwangju Asia Forum (2010). This event became a key global partnership program of the Foundation with a bigger and more diverse participation base. The Foundation also implemented various projects to train May 18 related talents. The Overseas Internship Program, which began in 2001, was greatly expanded to include more organizations and interns. In 2005, the Foundation began recruiting interns from abroad. By sponsoring the Master of Arts in Inter-Asian Non-Governmental Organizations Studies (MAINS) program at Sungkonghoe University in 2007, the Foundation started a long-term education program as well. There were changes made to the programs over the years, such as the Gwangju Asian Human Rights School being incorporated into the 5·18 Academy (2012) and closing its domestic activist course (2014). In addition, the Foundation has tried various other international projects which include supporting overseas CSOs, conducting monitoring visits, and operating international networks. As the

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45) Articles of Incorporation of the Foundation, Article 4, Paragraph 1, Item 8: Solidarity projects with domestic and foreign democratic and human rights organizations to commemorate and inherit the May 18 Democratization Movement

Foundation secured its own network and personnel, it was able to grow in size and in its work quality to be able to successfully implement international programs on its own.

### ◎ Turning Point (2015~2023)

In 2015, the Foundation reached another turning point. The Foundation faced internal and external challenges due to conflicts with its employees and CSOs. The Gwangju Metropolitan Government's administrative audit followed in 2017, leading to an overall decline in the Foundation's activities. The international program department especially had trouble implementing its projects due to personnel shortage, and the existing partnerships had weakened as well. To overcome this situation, the Foundation reorganized the Exchange and Solidarity Team into the Memorial Project Department, and reviewed the existing international projects in a critical light to develop new networks and programs. With the goal to “share experiences and achievements of May 18” through its international programs, the Foundation then focused on taking the initiative to implement these programs and strengthening its partnerships. The main initiative was for the Foundation to develop new networks by hosting regional meetings and workshops for the recipients of the Gwangju Human Rights Award. At the same time, the Foundation increased global publicity and communication through international conferences, the May 18 International Photo Exhibition, and web publications. The Foundation also established a Global NGO Master's Program (GNMP) in 2016 to strengthen the public, private and academic partnership in the region, and to foster international experts on May 18.

In 2018, the Foundation separated the work on international programs from the Memorial Project Department and reorganized it into the International Solidarity Department. This was to ensure independence of the international programs and for the Foundation to address international issues more actively. As a result, the Foundation was able to respond quickly and actively to democracy issues in the international community, including supporting the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, forming a solidarity organization to support the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar, and calling for the release of pro-democracy activists in Thailand. These efforts led to many accomplishments, among which were gaining special consultative status with the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and a voice at the UN on issues related to democracy and human rights.

In 2023, the Foundation upgraded its international programs department to “Glocal Center.” This was in response to the democracy and human rights issues that have been newly raised at the international level, which require a more systematic and strategic approach. The Foundation's support and efforts are crucial for the Glocal Center to expand the connectivity of its international projects and respond flexibly to international issues.

### 3. Overview of International Programs and Key Achievements

The international projects of the Foundation can be classified broadly into the following categories depending on the purpose and nature of the project: promotion, exchange, human resource development, and domestic and international solidarity. The current progress and major achievements of each project category are as follows.

#### ◎ Promotion Projects (Awards & Campaign)

Promotion projects aim to promote the meaning and value of the May 18 Democratization Movement to the global community. The May 18 Movement is regarded as a model and a source of inspiration for the Asian human rights movement, not only for its pivotal role in the democratization of Korea, but also as a major example of transitional justice. Promotion projects to commemorate and spread the noble spirit and values of May 18 include the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights, the Hinzfetter International Reporting Award, and the campaign to establish the “Universal Day for Prevention of Militarism and Authoritarianism.”

The Gwangju Prize for Human Rights is the Foundation's most representative program for international promotion. The prize was established in 2000 with the goal of promoting the spirit of the May 18 Democratization Movement in Korea. Since the first recipient, Xanana Gusmão (President of the National Council of Resistance of the People of East Timor), a total of 24 individuals and four organizations have been awarded as of 2023. In 2011, the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights established a new Special Prize, which is awarded biennially to living individuals and organizations that have contributed to the promotion of democracy and human rights in the fields of culture, art, media, and academia. As of 2023, a total of two people and five organizations have been awarded the Special Prize. Over the years, the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights has worked on its procedural issues by expanding nominee base in terms of the number and the region, and strengthening the verification process. The prize gained more prestige and influence as it showed support and solidarity to the recipients. In particular, with the establishment of the Network of the Laureates of Gwangju Prize (NLG) in 2021, the Foundation is looking for ways to draw attention to the recipients and their countries and to further strengthen global solidarity and action on human rights issues.

Another international promotion project is the Hinzfetter International Reporting Prize, which was established in 2021 in honor of Jürgen Hinzfetter, to find video journalists covering pro-democracy movements, and to share their efforts and spirit across the world.<sup>46)</sup> Also, in response to state violence and repression of democratization movements, the Foundation has been campaigning for the establishment of the UN Universal Day for Prevention of Militarism and Authoritarianism (UDPMA) since 2020 as a way to commemorate and promote the

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46) Awards are given in four categories, and the award ceremony is held biannually in Gwangju and Seoul.

May 18 Movement within the international community.

### ◎ Exchange Programs (Network & Forum)

The Foundation began its international exchange programs by engaging in interactions and solidarity with the families of victims of democratization movements in Asia. The Gathering of the Families and Organizations of Victims of Democracy in Asia began in 1999 to share the experience of Gwangju and to build a network with the victims of democracy in Asian countries. In 2004, the event was renamed the Gwangju International Peace Camp, and expanded to include not only the victims' families but also scholars and practitioners of democracy, human rights, and peace-related organizations in Korea and abroad. The event brought these participants together in Gwangju to explore the development of human rights and peace. In 2007, the event was reformatted and renamed the Gwangju International Peace Forum, and then based on its accumulated capabilities in 2010, it was further developed into the Gwangju Asia Forum. The event led to the establishment of the Solidarity of Democratization Movements in Asia (SDMA), an implementing body for the promotion of human rights and democracy in Asia, to address key issues facing CSOs in Asia.

In 2021, the Gwangju Asia Forum was renamed as the Gwangju Democracy Forum. The objective was to share more diverse agendas and explore practical responses not just in Asia, as challenges to democracy intensify globally. The forum is organized into sections with different topics. The forum also serves as a platform for the Foundation's projects, including the review of overseas grassroots support projects, workshop discussions for the recipients of the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights, and meetings as a regional hub. In 2021, as on-site participation was limited due to COVID-19, the event was organized as a hybrid meeting. Currently, it has become a major annual international forum with 300 to 400 participants from about 40 countries.

Meanwhile, the Foundation has been organizing regional hub meetings in different parts of Asia since 2015 to seek realistic solutions for human rights in the region. It is a practical network that gathers human rights activists, human rights experts, lawyers, and scholars from various countries in Asia to report on the actual human rights situation in their respective countries. Based on what is shared during this meeting, the participants also hold in-depth discussions on the response strategies to human rights violations in Asia, the direction of human rights activities in light of different constitutions and the Asian Charter on Human Rights, and the measures for institutional improvements. The participants also seek solutions to strengthen solidarity. The Foundation organized the East Asia Democracy, Human Rights and Peace Network in 2012 as a private sector network on democracy, human rights and peace. Seven organizations in Korea and four non-Korean organizations<sup>47)</sup> have signed a joint memorandum of

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47) There are seven organizations related to historical events (May 18 Memorial Foundation, Jeju April 3 Peace Foundation, Korea Democracy Foundation, Busan Democratic Movement Memorial Association, Burma



understanding (MOU) to work together as a network. This network aims to inherit and commemorate historical events such as wars, state violence, genocide, and human rights violations in major East Asian countries and the values of the democratization movement. Every year, the network holds regular meetings in the first half of the year and workshops in the second half of the year, showing mutual support and solidarity by participating in commemoration of historical events.

### ◎ Human Resource Development Programs

Human Resource Development Programs are educational programs that aim to build capacity of activists who can contribute to the development of civil society in and outside Korea. These activists will be utilized as a network for solidarity projects. Such programs include the May 18 Academy (short-term training program), the GNMP (long-term educational support program), and the international intern exchange program.

The May 18 Academy began in 2004 as a training program for civil society activists in Korea. The idea was to provide intensive lectures and discussions in Korea, followed by a two-week overseas training for field experience and to refresh themselves. Another program for non-Korean activists began with the Gwangju Asian Human Rights School in 2005. Practitioners from human rights and peace organizations in Asia were selected to participate in the program, which provided education on the May 18 Uprising, Korean democracy and human rights as well as a tour of key sites. In 2012, the Foundation combined these two training programs into the 5·18 Academy and divided them into 3 parts. Part 1 was for Korean activists, Part 2 for international activists, and Part 3 a professional course for commemorative projects. In 2015, the three parts were combined, eliminating the overseas training program portion and allowing Korean and international CSO activists to receive training together in Korea. In 2019, the National CSO Activist Academy was relaunched for activists in Korea, offering them both training in and outside the country. The 5·18 Academy combines the theoretical knowledge and field visits, and introduces the concept of Folk School, which is centered on discussion among the participants rather than lectures. The 5·18 Academy continues to this day as a human resource development program that strengthens solidarity with partner organizations while sharing the experiences and the spirit of the Korean democratization movement.

The Foundation also provides educational opportunities to foster local and international experts in the long-term. From 2007 to 2015, it supported the Master of Arts in Inter-Asia NGO Studies (MAINS)<sup>48)</sup> curriculum at Sungkonghoe

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Democracy Foundation, No Gun Ri International Peace Foundation, and Donghak Peasant Revolution Foundation), two organizations in Japan (Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum), and two organizations in Taiwan (February 28 Memorial Foundation and Preparatory Office of the National Human Rights Memorial Hall).

48) MAINS is a master's degree program launched by Sungkonghoe University in 2017 with the aim of fostering human resources to lead the growth and development of civil society

University and since 2016, it has been offering the Global NGO Master's Program (GNMP) based in Gwangju. The GNMP program was launched to train international leaders with the Gwangju Metropolitan City providing the necessary budget, the Foundation recruiting and selecting students, and Chonnam National University's 5-18 Research Institute managing the curriculum (General Graduate NGO Cooperation Course). After selecting four students in 2016, this program selected three to four students each year, and as of 2023, 23 students were selected, and 18 students have graduated. These students have become an invaluable asset for the Foundation's other networking programs, and 10 of the graduates went on to hold important roles in charge of democracy, human rights, and peace-related work at international NGOs. They are also an important part of the Gwangju Research and Advocacy Solidarity Network (GRAS-Net), which was formed in 2021, and are actively involved in various international solidarity activities.

The Foundation's international personnel exchange programs include the international intern recruitment and international intern secondment program. The international intern secondment program began in 2000 and was terminated after 2018.<sup>49)</sup> Only the international intern recruitment program, which began in 2005, is still in place, selecting activists recommended by the heads of partner organizations. These interns serve as a channel for exchange of information between countries and regions, and ensure continuity and expansion of the international network by managing web publications, English websites, network and supporting partnership projects with various organizations. A total of 37 international interns from 18 countries have been recruited from 2005 to 2023. After returning to their home countries, these interms become new contact points for the Foundation as they engage in democracy, human rights, and peace-related activities.

### ◎ Domestic and International Solidarity Programs

The Foundation is conducting various solidarity programs to respond to the global democracy and human rights issues, and to keep the May 18 spirit alive. In the early years, the solidarity programs were often one-time or temporary partnership projects, such as a memorial event for the missing persons in Sri Lanka and donation of clothes. Since securing the budget in 2005, the Foundation has been able to implement regular support programs for international CSOs. These programs were then transformed to select and provide practical support to CSOs

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in Asia. The Foundation signed an agreement with the Graduate School of NGO Studies at Sungkonghoe University for the period from 2007 to 2015 to provide a certain amount off educational support. However, there were limitations to developing this into a network for the Foundation and Gwangju.

49) The Overseas Internship Program was a project that provided short-term secondments, training, and educational activities to build stronger personnel and organizational exchanges for domestic and foreign partner organizations. The program has been terminated since 2018 due to issues relating to effectiveness, stability and operation as some participants returned mid-term.

based in Asia. From 2005 to 2015, the Foundation supported various projects and activities in 46 Asian countries regarding refugee education, human rights, women, election monitoring, conflict zone activities, democracy, judicial monitoring, state violence investigations and many more.

In 2015, in response to an administrative audit that ordered avoiding direct support for organizations, the Foundation launched the Joint Support for Asian Grassroots project, which allowed the Foundation to support and implement collaborative projects. From 2016 to 2020, 31 overseas grassroots organizations were supported. In 2021, the Foundation further expanded this project and established the Gwangju Democracy Fund based on the experience of the Gwangju Solidarity Fundraising Project for Democratization of Myanmar (2021–2022). By providing emergency donations in the name of Gwangju and May 18, the Gwangju Democracy Fund aims to actively promote democracy and human rights around the world where these values are being severely violated. This Fund utilizes a variety of financial resources, including the Foundation's own funds and operating revenues. A steering committee comprised of the Foundation's secretariat and international activity specialists consider the need, urgency and local context to determine the fund support.

In the early years, solidarity programs within Korea had also been passive, simply supporting May 18 commemorative events in other parts of the country. Once stable financial resources became available, the Foundation was able to fully implement projects to support CSOs in Korea. Since 2003, the Foundation has provided project support to CSOs on the themes of May 18, democracy, human rights, and peace. The goal was to foster grassroots CSOs. The project has changed its name and budget over the years to Support for Democracy, Human Rights, and Peace Projects in 2005, Support for Domestic NGOs in 2007 and to Inheritance of the May 18 Spirit for Domestic CSOs in 2014 but solidarity projects have continued to be carried out within the country. Apart from the support projects, the Regional Council on May 18 Commemoration Project was also formed to promote solidarity and joint projects across the nation. The Council co-hosts May 18 commemorative events with relevant organizations in each region of the country every year. It also promotes joint projects and solidarity to ensure proper education on May 18 and to respond to relevant issues. Currently, the commemorative ceremonies and cultural festivals are being held every year for a week in May in Busan, Daegu, Gyeongbuk, Deajeon, and Chungnam. The Foundation also supports and participates in the events held in other countries to promote and commemorate the May 18 Democratization Movement.

The Foundation has been active in recent years, responding quickly to democracy and human rights issues around the world. It does not remain silent about situations related to democracy, human rights, and peace in various countries, and rather, actively responds and expresses solidarity by issuing statements, promoting the issue via social media, and raising awareness through domestic and international networks. In particular, the Gwangju Solidarity for Myanmar, formed

in March 2021 with local CSOs, is a representative solidarity program led by the Foundation. It has carried out various support activities such as rallies, campaigns, distribution of publicity materials, photo exhibitions, creation of memorial spaces, and fundraising to raise awareness of the situation in Myanmar. In addition, the Foundation participated in the Gwangju Gathering to Pray for Peace in Ukraine, and has actively responded to international issues through candlelight vigils, lectures by Ukrainian activists, solidarity statements, and civic public relations activities.

#### 4. Closing

Discussions on the globalization of May 18 began in the early 1990s. At the time, international solidarity emerged as a key issue in the face of neoliberal globalization. In Korea, there was a discussion on the nationalization and globalization of May 18 to overcome the localism of the May 18 Democratization Movement. The globalization of May 18 was made possible thanks to the domestic and international environment, as well as the dedication of local CSOs in Gwangju that sought to engage in international solidarity. Since then, the May 18 Movement has been presented to the world as a successful example of clearing the past and transitioning to democracy in Korea. Various projects were developed to support the resistance movements directly or indirectly in the other parts of the world. The Foundation has played a central role in such efforts on the globalization of May 18.

On the other hand, international programs of the Foundation, which are considered to be its key achievements, have been criticized for its limitations. These limitations include the lack of professional manpower and budget, limited partners for exchanges and solidarity, project overlaps with other similar organizations, and institutional stagnation, despite the accomplishments in expanding solidarity and accumulating experience. Promoting international exchange programs in a sustainable manner required expanding and deploying specialized personnel, building staff capacity, and improving the internal project implementation system, and the Foundation has overcome many challenges to develop its international programs. The following is an evaluation of the Foundation's international programs to date.

First, the international programs of the Foundation have expanded in terms of both quantity and quality, moving from one-time and charitable projects to regular and stable projects. In the early years, the programs had been limited in nature to inviting foreign officials or providing funding. Later, as it secured stable finances and accumulated experience, the Foundation established the professionalism and procedural system needed to implement international programs.

Second, the Foundation is setting a leading and exemplary example for international programs that are organized by a private entity on historical events. It is not an easy task to modernize the meaning of a historical event and to develop international programs in various fields. Although one-time international events or exchange programs are often conducted, the Foundation is one of the few, if not

the only, private organization that has established regular programs and stable presence. This can be the result of hard work over a long period of time through various attempts.

Third, the Foundation is taking greater practical efforts to spread the May 18 spirit beyond Asia and across the world. In Asia, the Foundation has established a leading role by strengthening support and solidarity. At the international level, it has been recognized as a Special Consultative Status with the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The Foundation is also seeking to operate independently through its own funds and contributions, which is expected to further elevate the Foundation's international profile.

Over the past 30 years, the Foundation has seen many accomplishments in its international programs despite the limitations and challenges. It was able to diversify its programs from one-time, charitable programs to those with more continuity and sustainability, while also taking the initiative and building a new, independent network. The scope of the programs is also growing outside Asia, and into the rest of the world. Despite the difficult challenges along the way, the Foundation was able to overcome them because many people were dedicated to ensuring project stability, finding effective ways to build solidarity, and focusing on the key mission. Now, the Foundation is in a position to expand its role and respond to the demands from the international community utilizing its experience and expertise so far. The reorganization of the Glocal Center will be the first step in this direction, and the new goal should be advanced based on support and cooperation.

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## Experience of the International Project

Don Tajaroensuk  
People's Empowerment Foundation

### Experience of the International Project

First of all, I would like to say gratitude for the anniversary of 30 years of the establishment of the May 18 Foundation. I would like to say thank you to May 18 on behalf of our friends from many countries. It is honored to be here again as a representative for giving speech and discussion about the way forward for the next era of democracy for May 18 Foundation.

Firstly, I heard about May 18 from our senior colleagues in my Thailand, the story of brave people-led movement for democracy in small city of Korea Gwangju city, that later wide spreading to other countries regionally and internationally. Personally, my first memory connected with May18 that when I first met with former executive director, Kim Yangrae, who just recently passed away in 2023. I cannot remember the year, but after that day, I have greatly connected with May18 since that day. I have been involved with many May 18 international programs, such as GNMP, GPHR, GDF, May 18 Academy, May18 Mayzine, UDPMA and other projects.

GNMP, Global NGO Master Program, it is the program that have the most impact on my professionalism. I grew up a lot from this program. After my bachelor's graduation, I first had no intention of continuing further education such as a master's program. As eventually inspired by May18, I have changed my mind. In another reason that Thailand and another country do not have NGO studies, and very fewer human rights institutes. During the classes, we have learned from prominent social activists for human rights activism and also from the professors who can shape our thoughts for analytical ability for NGO management. With the freedom of academics, I could freely choose my research topic based on my self-motivation. My master's research conducted under the GNMP program has become well-known in Thai society as a pioneer study on the social factors and condition of Thai undocumented migrant workers to understand the difficult lives of underprivileged persons. This master research widely spread my thoughts and analysis into Thai society, including promoted reputation in my career path. Moreover, the GNMP program also encouraged me to have engagement with Gwangju citizens through several local activities so that we could absorb the spirit of Gwangju citizens into our consciousness. Once, I remembered we, GNMP students, protested overnight at Jeonil Building 245 together with Gwangju citizens. This experience has taught me about the collective actions from ground-based movements. One more thing I would like to share with anyone here about GNMP, the way we call our classmates is "family", even though everyone already graduated in 2018, but we still get in touch closely with each other.

Gwangju Prize for Human Rights Awards (GPHR), during the massive democratic movement in Thailand 2020–2023, the political activists who called out for a just society and reforming the monarchy system were being stigmatized by the authorities and conservative opposition. If I can give some example for impact of GPHR, I may refer to the award presented by GPHR to well-known lawyer Anon Nampa, the laureate of the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights Awards in 2021, who has a great significant contribution to Thai society and the democratic movement. It encourages a young generation and those who recall democracy, which this GPHR award emphasizing what they have been doing is appropriately the right thing to do against the stigmatization from authorities and opposition. Although, the democratic movement these days has lessened, but among Thai society, we have recognized this great contribution from GPHR, hope is still igniting among young people. The democratic movement either in Thailand or other countries can be back anytime. Unfortunately, currently, Anon Nampa is being jailed by the Penal Code of Conduct Article 112, the Lese Majeste law. Also, many young leaders as political activists are gradually being imprisoned. Please do not forget them all, to those all-in significant countries respectively. In essence, GPHR has provided awards to real activists who are working closely on the ground and all laureates must initially be nominated by activists around the world. I do surely believe that GPHR has a greater democratic contribution and motivation to many countries as well, maintaining significantly the hope of the people for change. GPHR is the core channel that links the spirit of Gwangju to other countries. Thank you again to May18 for the contribution of the GPHR awards and congratulate with all laureates, your efforts will be constantly remembered.

May 18 Academy and Gwangju Democracy Forum, anyone may have heard about these programs already, these programs collectively allow social activists to meet for exchanging and sharing experiences. It also consequently creates a larger collaboration across respective countries. Many friends, we still meet each other in the world of social movement. Many transnational programs, projects, campaigns and cooperation have been created after meeting at the academy and forum.

I witnessed that May18 not merely works in South Korea, May18 has also worked transnational program in emergency situation. During the armed crisis in Myanmar, while the number of asylum seekers and refugees have fled to Thailand and humanitarian aid needed following the escalation of the conflict is increasing, May18 friends in collaboration with Gwangju networks conducted a fact-finding mission visiting along Thai-Myanmar border seeking possible ways to support Myanmar people during the conflict situation.

There are still many projects that I have involved, I also engaged in writing a national report on transnational justice and democracy report, and UDPMA the global campaign for anti-dictatorship and so many other projects.

I may say that engaging with the May 18 is not just only a section of training or

learning, but it is part of my life's development. We still have hope because of your contribution, the May 18 should have know that the story of Gwangju has been repeatedly depicted widely during the election, social and political campaigns in Thailand and, also, I think it must happen in other countries in the same way. My memory and experience with May 18 are overwhelmed, I would like to say thank you again for being beside us. I hope May 18 will be still with us for the long pathway to achieve human rights and democracy in our countries.

**Expectations of the Foundation's International Affairs**

Regarding the expectation for foundation international affairs, I will first explain a statement of the problem of the current situation of democracy in Asia.

Country	Democracy Index			CPI (Corruption Perception Index)	
	Overall Score 0-10	World Rank	Status	Score (0-100)	World Rank (180)
Malaysia	7.29	40	Flawed Democracy	50	57
Timor Leste	7.06	45		43	70
Philippines	6.66	53		34	115
Indonesia	6.53	56		34	115
Thailand	6.35	63		35	108
Singapore	6.18	69		83	5
Sri Lanka	6.17	70		34	115
Hong Kong	5.24	88	Hybrid Regime	75	14
Nepal	4.60	98		35	108
Pakistan	3.25	118	Authoritarian	29	133
Cambodia	3.05	121		22	158
Burkina Faso	2.73	133		41	83
Vietnam	2.62	136		41	83
China	2.12	148		42	76
Laos	1.71	159		28	136
Myanmar	0.85	166		20	162

- Weak democracy = increased organized crimes → poverty, exploitation, marginalization
- Weak democracy = disruption to an election process → loss of people participation
- Weak democracy = dysfunction of the rule of law
- Weak democracy = increasing authoritarianism → extortion, stigmatization, state violence, human rights violation, massive killing

As we may see in the table to understand the overview of democracy in Asia, it demonstrates that after a long period of campaigns about democracy, the tendency of authoritarianism is increasing in counterpart with the democracy index in ASEAN and Asia region which is dramatically stepping back. Importantly, the shrinking space of democracy can lead to the high feasibility of corruption. What corruption is essential to be discussed here is to analyze who is the real enemy, hereafter I will call them as "an enemy" meaning either a government, an authority, a politician, a business, a person, or a group whose role is relatively disrupting democracy, civil space and human rights. Paradoxically, the shrinking of democracy cannot identify an actor and conglomerate who are real enemies that may be



currently taking profit, seizing benefits and committing corruption from less democratic fragile states while the population of states becoming weaker and weaker by its undemocratically and forms of exploitation, marginalization and stigmatization.

Personally, throughout my analysis, as much as the movement of people becomes democratically stronger, the democracy and civil space may be more significantly restrained in the reason that an enemy wants to control their circumstances for their transnational intragroup benefits and lucrative activities under power arranged by authoritarianism, which sometime may mostly involve state's national budgets. Corruption within national budgets, it has caused the worst negative effects to all people by tacitly forcing people impoverished. In many countries, making people in a marginalized condition can allow state authorities to arbitrarily extort money from those marginalized persons, even largely by legal processes. It also has led to various results of human rights violations, the increasing of organized crime organizations throughout ASEAN has a direct strong impact on people such as human and sex trafficking, modern slavery, illicit drugs, online scammers and casinos, etc. At the worst, the massive armed crisis in Myanmar depicts the worst scenario of an authoritative and military regime, it ends up with armed conflict and the loss of people's life enormously. The increasing number of asylum seekers and refugees caused by armed conflict become a challenge for the international community to emergency respond to this problem.

Moreover, throughout the undemocratic system, it can lead to unaware and unexpected results that we may never have considered. Promoting democracy can urge the government for accountability, transparency and justice which can benefit to all human beings. In this sense, we have not failed on advocating democracy, but an enemy wants to maintain and sustain their power. It means we, the democratic movement, have become stronger, therefore, an enemy has to create a new maneuver to protect their own spaces and tradition. We should realize it and develop strategies to counter this phenomenon.

**What I expect and want to see for the May 18 international affairs**

First Expectation, support a new generation of young politicians

The tendency of increasing a new young politician is essential to anticipate the new era of people's movement. The establishment of Future Forward and Move Forward Parties in Thailand has become an inspiration to those young people in ASEAN. Young people are more critical of certain changes by reaching political power in legislation. In the future, a new politician in Asia will be able significantly enlarged following the aspirations of young people who need real change in society. The network should be more inclusive the participation of young politicians who can expand a discussion on democracy and human rights at policy levels, legislation and other relevant social issues. Furthermore, it could open dialogue on common transnational issues that politicians across the region should

reach out to solve it together.

Additionally, we could not only focus on young politicians. Social change also needs more relevant actors through social interaction. We may open any possibility to include actors from other sectors such as entrepreneurs, and media. Investing in the young will never be meaningless, it is the transmittance of the democratic spirit. Winning social change by election is the best achievement through peaceful resolution.

Young Politicians + Young CSOs + Young other groups (entrepreneurs, media)  
Winning Election for Change = Peaceful Resolution

Second Expectation, new innovative approaches in promoting democracy, human rights and peace.

The concept of "soft power" becomes more significant in social change, it can describe the use of positive attraction to achieve foreign policy objectives and draw on the resources that make some specific things naturally attractive to the world. We should consider how to motivate mass publicity to be interested in building democracy, expanding our new attraction. South Korea is one country with several successful stories arranged by soft power through K-POP and Korean drama.

What if we can utilize it, we can rapidly expand and approach new mass people across the country.

A suggested program may be initiated through online platforms that can be applied to the mass population attraction.

Innovative Approach = Mass Interaction

Third Expectation, advocate transitional justice in respective countries.

Caused by extraordinary human rights violations, especially state violence within an undemocratic state system, the importance of transitional justice is certainly matters as evidence for protecting human rights and human dignity. In fact, May18 has been working on it very well. I want to emphasize intensifying transitional justice projects to help collect the historical events and stories. For instance, those May18 Glocal Issue Monitoring Reports, and evidence can be later sent to the United Nations mechanism to promote human rights. May18 can consider itself such as transnational justice institute working across many countries in Asia.

Essentially, the transition justice is importantly needed in Myanmar to be in line with the Second People's Assembly of NUCC (the National Unity Consultative Council). May18 may significantly propose some role for TJ in Myanmar.

Transnational Justice = collecting memories, evidence and stories, ending the cycle  
of violence

Fouth Expectation, representation of May18 and network in international and regional stages toward human rights mechanisms

While the regional and national mechanisms for democracy and human rights are dysfunctional, the CSOs in the future may importantly turn to rely on international mechanisms. May18 can take a leading role in supporting and bridging local networks to engage with international human rights mechanisms. May18 can consider its representation to be more existing on the international stage. We may consider having such as international joint-statement, human rights report submitted at the UN.

International Mechanisms = UPR, Treaty Bodies, Special Procedure

Fifth Expectation, people-to-people connection

The key success of democracy is a public awareness of democracy. Since last 6-7 years, May18 has achieved a great interconnection among CSOs across the region, with later on including academics. However, to achieve a great awareness of democracy, we should deliberately interact with the mass community in promoting democracy which may include human rights and peace. We should have any ground-based program that can create people-to-people connections, such as cross-countries training and activities, or may it be a social enterprise project creating touring for democracy that all ordinary people can anytime join with program.

People-to-people = Sustainable Democracy

Sixth Expectation, international humanitarian supports

While preparing this speech, the crisis in Myanmar is escalating, everyday the amount of people dying is sadly increasing. Massive armed conflict committed by the junta has extensively affected innocent people, including women, children and all vulnerable people. Regarding the crisis in Myanmar, there are over a million innocent people who require humanitarian support in urgent situations. The fundamental principle of humanitarianism is to protect all people's life who are totally not, or no more, involved with armed fights. Very close to Thai-Myanmar border, if we cross the border to the Myanmar side, we will see a certain situation in which over 300,000 children cannot go to access proper and basic educations, over 1,000,000 hunger IDPs are living in the condition of malnutrition and starvation. There are a lot of wounded people who get affected by the armed conflict, many surgical medical tools and medicines are hastily needed to be provided to local health centers. It is hard to imagine that how people are living without those rudimentary tools and facilities.

This problem urgently needs to be solved to protect those innocent people. I urge May18 and the international community to hand supports to those people.

Fundraising programs or any initiative projects should be taken urgently to respond to humanitarian crisis. May18 can be in cooperation with other stakeholders, Gwangju and Korean citizens, collect and send support to the Thai-Myanmar border to save innocent people.

However, humanitarian needs may not only occur in Myanmar but it can exist in anywhere. We should be prepared for these phenomena that may occur anytime in anywhere.

Humanitarian = Save People's life

Lastly, I would like to encourage May18 and all stakeholders to continue its works that has contributed to a community. We wish May18 will be more strengthened as while democracy in many countries is dysfunctional, the role of May18 is essential. It is still long way for achieve democracy for all, we hope that along the way, we will have been continually seeing May18 as key partners and best friends.

## Transition and Direction of the International Solidarity Projects of the May 18 Foundation

Jung Ho-Gi  
Visiting Professor, Woosuk University

### 1. Introduction

The modern and contemporary history of South Korea has unfolded under the shadows of colonialism, war and authoritarian regimes. This era, marked by myriad events both significant and minor, saw a great number of individuals sacrificed prematurely or subjected to immense suffering. Among these historical episodes, certain events demand social redress and historical reassessment, commonly referred to as ‘past injustices.’ These past injustices, characterized in various ways, often fall under the categories of ‘democratization’ or ‘democratic movements,’ which are shown on a large scale. Thus, they are the core concepts that demonstrate the structural features, scars and dynamism of the contemporary history in South Korea.

The May 18 Uprising is recognized as an especially notable historic injustice. It has been implicitly recognized for a long time, while lacking a clear definition. The May 18 Democratization Movement, a composite of numerous incidents and actions, has been challenging to precisely define and characterize. Particularly in the formulation and application of laws and systems, as well as in their recognition and appreciation, the lines of distinction were often ambiguous or muddled, frequently leading to disputes in opinion. As a result, the definition of the movement was occasionally handled expediently, restricted to times when the activities were actively taking place or when it was strategically beneficial to meet certain objectives, although this approach was admittedly imprecise.

The May 18 Uprising was legally defined approximately 38 years after its occurrence in May 1980. On March 13, 2018, under Act No. 15434, known as the Special Act on Investigating the Truth of the May 18 Democratization Movement, Article 2 (Definition) characterizes the May 18 Uprising as “a demonstration held in Gwangju-related regions in May 1980, against which the military, etc. committed the crime of destroying constitutional order and unlawfully exercised governmental authority, resulting in numerous victims and sufferers.” Additionally, Article 1 (Purpose) of this Act explicitly states that “human rights abuses, violence, massacre, secret burials, etc. caused by anti-democratic or anti-humane acts committed by state power occurred at the time in relation to the May 18 Uprising in 1980.”

While the Act defines the temporal scope of the May 18 Uprising as May 1980, the institutional acknowledgment of victims and sufferers has been applied more expansively in terms of both time and space. Some individuals involved in

collective actions during this period, which aimed at correcting distortions and denigration by the new military forces and demanded the punishment of those responsible, were recognized as victims of the May 18 Democratization Movement. This aspect is considered a distinguishing feature of the May 18 Uprising from other past injustices. These activities have been typically termed the “May Movement” or “May Uprising” (Gan-Chae Na, 2012). The May Movement significantly overlapped with the broader democratization movements of the 1980s, particularly within the sphere of political democratization.

The phenomenon that unfolded at this time was uniquely characterized by ‘solidarity.’ The May Movement was a social movement rooted in solidarity. Despite not being direct victims of state violence, and lacking social networks of kinship or relationships, countless individuals willingly joined the movement and endured various harms and sacrifices to uncover the truth and hold those responsible accountable. This action and phenomenon were deeply rooted in ‘empathy.’ At this time, empathy was understood in terms akin to those defined by Geoff Thomas and Garth Fletcher, namely, “**empathy is triggered by emotionally sharing the plight of others, recognizing the need to alleviate their pain and is followed by emotional and practical responses to assist**” (Rifkin, 2019: 21).

The May 18 Uprising expanded beyond domestic solidarity with social movement groups and forces to become ‘international solidarity.’ This expansion has garnered considerable attention and interest. The international solidarity facilitated by the May 18 Uprising has evolved over decades, experiencing phases of expansion and contraction, alongside continuous adjustments and refinements. International solidarity has operated through multiple channels, bridging countries, organizations and various sectors and themes such as religion, labor, farmers and the environment. Nevertheless, the role of the May 18 Uprising as a pivotal link in international solidarity is undeniably significant. This connection was possible because, despite variations in historical, social and event-specific contexts, there was a shared foundation of experience, coupled with a recognized need to continue and share redressive activities. Thus, it can be viewed as an indicator that a global consensus on the importance and value of the May 18 Uprising has been established.

Despite the activities and achievements of international solidarity, research in this field remains insufficient. Previous studies, such as those by Gan-Chae Na (2009, 2012) and Chan-Ho Kim (2018) and initiatives by the Institute for Korean Democracy under the Korea Democracy Foundation (2018), have concentrated on how international solidarity was established through the May 18 Uprising and its accomplishments. This article will critically review these previous studies, focusing on their issues and main points and will specifically examine the ‘international solidarity projects’ of the May 18 Foundation (hereafter, “Foundation”), in reflection of the hypothesis that the Foundation has focused on “projects” rather than “movement” while seeking international solidarity. This paper aims to investigate whether the hypothesis is true through the transition, and to concentrate

on current key projects to outline future directions.

## 2. The Basis of International Solidarity: From “Movement” to “Memorialization”

In South Korea, past injuries that are recognized or currently addressed as targets for redress typically occurred during significant transitional periods or are characterized by violations of humanity that sparked public outrage due to their inhumane nature. The criteria for distinguishing past injustices of South Korea are importantly applied to specific periods. Generally, these are divided into the periods of the Donghak Peasant Revolution, the Japanese Imperialism, the period before and after the Korean War and following the April Revolution. The May 18 Uprising is categorized within the past injustices that occurred after the April Revolution. These past injustices are classified into several types, while the May 18 Uprising specifically falls under the categories of “state violence” and “human rights abuses.” The incidents stemming from state violence show considerable variation in how they unfolded, the damage inflicted and their overall impacts. The May 18 Uprising was notable and unique for its instance where students and citizens took up arms against special forces commanded by the new military regime, leading to the massacre of thousands of students and citizens who suffered both physical and psychological harm.

The symbolism and significance of the May 18 Uprising were reshaped by the influence of various subsequent phenomena and actions. Among past injustices subject to redress, the intensity and persistence of its memory struggle related to this movement are unmatched. Today, the May 18 Uprising stands firmly on the foundations laid by the May Movement. Although the May 18 Uprising and the May Movement varied greatly in their developments and methods, they continued almost seamlessly and interacted extensively. This seamless continuation and interaction are atypical even when examining the process of redressing past injustices of South Korea. The sustained representation of the May 18 Uprising as a potent social movement tradition is largely attributable to this factor.

Reflecting on the memory struggle of the May 18 Democratization Movement, the 1990s marked a definitive transitional phase to institutional domains. Following the June 10 Democratization Struggle, the memory struggle for the May 18 Uprising transitioned from illegal and unlawful stages to increasingly or rapidly semi-legal and legal ones. This transition facilitated a broadening in the diversity and orientation of participants, leading to a shift in the methods of collective action, the scope of solidarity and its targets. These shifts altered the patterns of resistive memory struggles, closely linked to the growth of civil society and the swift emergence and expansion of citizen movements. Here, macro-level trends such as the easing of inter-state conflicts and ideological clashes amid the global Cold War system and shifts in international relations in Asia contributed. The establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea, Russia and China not only impacted regional perceptions and exchanges focusing on the Korean Peninsula, Japan and Taiwan but also the emergence of democratization movements across various Asian

countries further facilitated the building of consensus (Korea Democracy Foundation, 2007). Consequently, by the mid-1990s, the methods and nature of social movements experienced rapid transformations, fostering a deeper understanding of the geopolitical shifts in Asia. These elements significantly contributed to the memory struggle of the May 18 Democratization Movement.

As structures and relationships evolved, the nature of the May Movement shifted, marking distinct changes at critical points. For example, when compared to the early to mid-1980s, the period post-mid-1990s displayed more differences than similarities. Notably, its deliberate distance from grassroots social movements sparked debates over its identity. Although the scarcity of research makes it difficult to assert conclusively, it can be considered that by the 2000s, the May Movement had effectively reached its conclusion, regardless of whether its aims and objectives were realized. This was evident on multiple occasions. A critical moment occurred during the address of then President Kim Young-sam on May 13, 1993, which clearly marked the divergence of the May Movement from broader democratization efforts. This address introduced various redress strategies, which incorporated many of the proposals previously outlined by the May Movement.

The most prominent issue addressed was the redefinition of the nature of the uprising, which aimed to eliminate the negative stigma and burden associated with the new military forces. This shift also signaled a change in the approach to promoting memorial projects. It is important to note that while earlier governments had discussed and attempted to initiate policies on memorial projects at the national level, these efforts had stalled. Therefore, it could be seen as a change in the perception and stance of victims and civil society towards the state actions. The special address played a crucial role in advancing memorial projects, leading to significant achievements across various projects. Now, the memory struggle of the May 18 Uprising is approaching a new milestone.

The establishment of a mass burial site, a central location commemorating the May 18 Democratization Movement, and the judicial punishment of the perpetrators occurred almost concurrently. The mass burial site was officially completed with a ceremony in May 1997. The entire project, from initiation to completion, was carried out during the Kim Young-sam administration. In the latter stages of this project, efforts to file lawsuits and establish special acts were made. The judicial punishment of the new military forces marked the climax of these efforts. These developments and outcomes suggested that it was no longer feasible to return to the earlier forms of resistive memory struggles.

### 3. Systematization and Transition of International Solidarity Projects

Examining the approach to redressing past injustices in South Korea, international solidarity efforts related to the May 18 Uprising started early. A related example is shown in a photo from *The Testimony of the Priest* (Pius Cho, 1994). The



photograph depicts members of a foreign human rights group holding a placard during their visit to the May 18 Cemetery in May 1991, that states, “We express our condolences and stand in solidarity with them.” This image demonstrates that these international delegates visited Gwangju collectively during the May event, embodying an act of solidarity. The year 1991 came after the initial compensations to the victims and sufferers and coincided with another peak in the democratization movement, marked by the “May 1991 Struggle” or “May 1991 Political Situation” (Youth Group for May 1991 Struggle, 2002; Kyung-won Kwon, 2021). Consequently, for foreign visitors in Gwangju during May 1991, the May 18 Uprising could still resonate as a vivid and ongoing event.

In contrast, the “Citizens’ Alliance for Sanctuary for May” (hereinafter, “Citizens’ Alliance”), which officially commenced operations on January 12, 1994, was grounded on a foundation distinct from that of more revolutionary social movements. Instead, the Citizens’ Alliance took strategies aimed at institutional improvements and used methods of dialogue and persuasion (Citizens’ Alliance for Sanctuary of May, 1994: 7). This organization, as demonstrated by events such as the international symposium on May 17, 1994, titled “The May 18 People’s Uprising as Viewed from Abroad,” and the press conference on May 19, titled “The May 18 Gwangju People’s Uprising and International Solidarity,” primarily aimed to invite foreign democracy activists and supporters of the Korean democratization movement to share their insights on the May 18 Uprising and to showcase the achievements of redress. These gatherings, which were conducted annually, revolved around networks established by certain figures.

The Foundation started its operations based on the international solidarity activities inherited from the Citizens’ Alliance. Over the past two decades, these international solidarity projects have evolved and undergone significant transformations. The Foundation assumed responsibility for these projects starting in 2000, but the establishment of the basis and the reform of the organizational structure did not occur until June 2002 and then again starting in 2005, respectively. Several reorganizations have taken place since then, with 2018 marking a major turning point. The activities experienced a downturn for a few years due to COVID-19, but efforts to rejuvenate and recover have been made since 2023. Observing the accomplishments during this period, the systematization and transition of the international solidarity projects can be outlined as follows:

First, the evolution of department names responsible for international solidarity provides insights into the operational focus. In the early 2000s, these departments were undifferentiated. The establishment of the Department of International Cooperation when the business division was divided into two signifies the initial recognition of the significance of this function. The Department of International Cooperation was founded in 2005, supported by government subsidies. This department then transitioned through various phases, becoming the International Cooperation Team (2006), the Exchange and Solidarity Team (2008), the Memorial Program Department (2015), the International Solidarity Department (2018) and

eventually the May 18 Glocal Center (2023).

From this evolution, it is evident that the core understanding of international solidarity has shifted from “cooperation” to “exchange” and finally to “solidarity.” The term “solidarity” has consistently appeared in project names regardless of the specific department. However, it is apparent that from 2008 to 2021, the focus was predominantly on cooperation. While “solidarity” and “cooperation” are sometimes used together or interchangeably, cooperation generally suggests a more casual relationship. Initially, cooperation was mainly categorized as a subset of projects within the broader scope of international solidarity but was promoted to a departmental name starting in 2018.

Second, the changed nature of the international solidarity projects led by the Foundation is another point. The Foundation not only embraced the structure and framework of international solidarity as practiced by the Citizens’ Alliance but also retained the same staff. Given its prior involvement in various events through hosting and sponsorship alongside the Citizens’ Alliance, transitioning projects was not difficult. Consequently, the early 2000s saw the continuation of a project approach similar to that of the Citizens’ Alliance. However, the movement-oriented initiatives once sought by the Citizens’ Alliance did not persist. While the Foundation has its origins in and was influenced by social movements, its nature markedly diverged from that of typical social movement or civil society organizations.

The Foundation’s approach to international solidarity typically mirrored the project formats prevalent within institutional frameworks. This approach appears to have been heavily affected by the various pressures and scrutiny associated with government funding. Consequently, projects and programs focused on awards, education, camps and invitation events became foundational to the structure. Changes to project methodology began in 2005 with a program aimed at supporting foreign civil society organizations. This program was later rebranded in 2016 as “Support for Asian Grassroots Organizations” and has recently changed into the “Gwangju Democracy Fund” project, which the Foundation is actively seeking and trying to expand.

Third, it is about the methods and changes of the international solidarity projects. They can be discerned through the dynamics of key human resources involved and the locations where the projects take place. Predominantly, these programs have involved inviting international participants to South Korea and implementing programs prepared by the Foundation. They could be seen as having displayed a more inward-looking rather than outward-reaching approach, influenced significantly by the constraints of available resources and capacities for participation or mobilization. This may suggest that the international solidarity projects lacked the robust infrastructure necessary to broaden their international footprint.

Additionally, there were projects that deployed human resources overseas for training and practical experience. The overseas intern dispatch program was a

prime example of such efforts. Launched in 2001, this program ran until it was suspended in 2018 due to various issues, including the safety of interns abroad and challenges in recruiting individuals who met the requisite skills and conditions demanded by the host countries. Another significant obstacle was the younger generation's reluctance to participate in these programs, compounded by disruptions to direct interactions and exchanges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fourth, the educational programs have become established as distinct international solidarity projects, setting them apart from those organized by other past injustice foundations and organizations. Initiated in 2004 as the "Gwangju Asia Human Rights School," this educational program has evolved into what is now known as the "May 18 Academy." There is a strong demand for educational programs in both the past injustices and civil society sectors, presenting a challenge to develop the necessary infrastructure to fulfill these needs, while the Foundation has embraced this challenge. However, it remains difficult to ascertain whether educational content and resources that can be practically applied and referenced in field activities are being adequately provided, and what impacts these resources are having.

#### 4. Direction and Prospects of International Solidarity Projects

International solidarity projects were not initially among the main purposes at the establishment of the Foundation. This sector was distinctive in that it was derived from civil society organizations and has become an integral part of the operations of the Foundation. Consequently, there remained a gap in fully defining the necessity, purpose and targets of international solidarity projects. The "Master Plan for the Memorial Project of the May 18 Democratization Movement" has been drafted and revised multiple times, addressing the characteristics and direction of international solidarity projects, albeit with limited emphasis and detail.

It is acknowledged that a variety of perspectives on international solidarity projects exist. This diversity was highlighted in a survey conducted as part of the "Research for the Establishment of the Master Plan for May 18 Memorial Project" in 2016. A prevailing sentiment was that the Foundation should place greater emphasis on the May 18 Uprising and focus on projects for the victims and those affected. It can be seen that there is a consensus to some extent that international solidarity should globally promote the truths and achievements of the May 18 Uprising and facilitate the sharing and preservation of its redressive accomplishments. Nonetheless, when it comes to defining the scope, focus and targets of international solidarity efforts, it appears that discussions have not been sufficient, and the processes necessary to achieve consensus have not been fully implemented. Although international solidarity projects have managed to establish a framework and stabilize their objectives, they also exhibit sudden shifts and the sporadic establishment and suspension of operations. These dynamics are intricately linked to the generational shifts associated with the aging participants of the May 18 Uprising and the emergence of subsequent generations unfamiliar with these past

injustices.

Second, there is the challenge of defining the character and status of international solidarity projects. As previously noted, the Foundation is a public benefit corporation that receives funding from both the central and local governments. Despite being a private corporation, it operates with the characteristics of a quasi-public institution and adheres to similar regulations. A significant turning point for the Foundation came when it underwent a financial audit by the Gwangju Metropolitan City concerning the management of national subsidies in 2008 and when it was subject to an administrative audit by the same city in 2009. These audits significantly shaped the identity and operational methods of the Foundation, impacting both internal and external dynamics. Consequently, many of the traits typically associated with civil society organizations were significantly reduced.

The international solidarity projects recently executed by the Foundation have shown a deliberate effort to reclaim their activist roots. The “Research for the Establishment of the Master Plan for May 18 Memorial Project,” mentioned earlier, advocated for a strengthening of this activist orientation. A key example of the changes within the Foundation is its involvement in democracy and human rights issues. This initiative sees the Foundation actively engaging with various contemporary issues, playing a pivotal role. Similarly, the creation of the Gwangju Democracy Fund to support international civil society organizations aligns with this approach. The Gwangju Human Rights Award, initially noted for its symbolic and honorary value, has started to provide tangible support to activists in the democracy and human rights sectors. This stance has led to incidents of protests and disputes with the foreign ministries of relevant countries. Should the Foundation continue to enhance projects that bolster the characteristics of civil society movements, such occurrences are likely to become more frequent.

Third, specialized expertise derived from experiences of managing international solidarity projects and a sustainable networking foundation should be developed. Although all projects undertaken by the Foundation require high levels of expertise and stable trust relationships, international solidarity projects need a more intensive set of conditions and environments. These projects involve complex tasks such as quickly understanding the varied situations and conditions faced by associated organizations and key participants, with the formation of trust relationships requiring significant investment in resources.

The Foundation has encountered several critical moments concerning this issue, where networks and relationships were either disrupted or needed to be rebuilt. The evolution of the international solidarity projects indicates a complete transition from their initial phases. This change may be unavoidable, yet it also suggests that there may not have been substantial improvements in the initial project execution methods. Consequently, it is essential to develop strategies to stabilize these projects and to establish a support system and structure that ensures ongoing support.

Fourth, there is an issue of establishing the uniqueness and identity of the

international solidarity projects of the Foundation. The Foundation is a leader in the international solidarity sector, often guiding the activities and projects of other past injustice institutions and organizations. While this leadership is generally viewed positively, it also places a considerable burden on the Foundation. Furthermore, there are inevitable concerns about the overlap and effectiveness of themes and content of the “World Human Rights Cities Forum” organized by the Gwangju Metropolitan City.

For instance, the theme of the “KDF Global Forum” hosted by the Korea Democracy Foundation in 2023 was “Korean Democracy and Global Solidarity: Sharing and Dissemination of Experience.” Meanwhile, the theme of the “2nd World Revolutionary City Joint Conference” organized by Jeongeup-si in 2023 was “Remembrance and Solidarity in Modern Revolutionary Cities.” Additionally, the “Conference to Mark the 11th Anniversary of the Registration of the May 18 as Memory of the World and the 40th Anniversary of the Death of Martyr Park Kwan-hyun” in 2022 carried the theme “Beyond Boundaries to Memory of Empathy and Solidarity.” In the realm of events and programs concerning past injustices, “solidarity” emerges as a highly favored concept. Regardless of whether these events fully incorporate the depth and nuances of “solidarity,” it is challenging to overlook the perception that it has become routinely used.

Fifth, there is another issue of accumulating and continuously refreshing the accomplishments of international solidarity projects. Although countless documents and records have been generated through these projects, there has been a shortfall in progressing to a stage where these can be systematically organized for medium to long-term use. It is pertinent to question the appropriateness of using articles presented at the “Gwangju Asia Forum” solely for the event. If papers and discussions from the event were compiled into official publications, subsequent programs could develop more sophisticated agenda settings, with corresponding topic presentations and enriched discussions. Achieving this requires that program preparation be significantly more detailed and rigorous than it is presently, and that a system be developed to sustain ongoing communication and exchanges after the event.

## 5. Conclusion

The French sociologist Durkheim early on formulated the ‘theory of solidarity’ and used it to analyze modernity. As notions of liberty that stood in opposition to the arbitrary rule of the absolutist state, equality that challenged the feudal class system and fraternity that represented social integration, which were the ideals of the French Revolution, began to fray, he actively applied the concept of ‘solidarity,’ reflective symbolic resource designed to fill the voids. In Europe, the pursuit of solidarity had been a political endeavor since before 1848, during which it was further refined and adopted by various ideological factions. The context of that era significantly shaped his solidarity theory. Building on this foundation, Durkheim stated that ‘an individual is fundamentally a social being, and therefore

has obligations towards society, which is regarded as a kind of sacred sentiment.’ (Jongyup Kim, 1998: 197–205)

Solidarity was also active in South Korea during the influx of Western modernization. The Donghak Peasant Revolution of 1894, led by Donghak followers and peasants with diverse opinions and viewpoints, was rooted in solidarity. Throughout the Japanese Imperialism, many progressives who participated in the independence movement and anti-Japanese war, despite not sharing aligned ideologies, methods and goals, and often inflicting deep wounds on each other, still upheld the principle of solidarity. This conduct was apparent in the fierce ideological conflicts and confrontations after the liberation of Korea and even impacted the ‘passion’ that fueled efforts to dismantle and overcome authoritarian regimes like Ilgogam [monolith: a single huge stone].

The May 18 Uprising was the result of a complex solidarity that had evolved over a considerable period. While solidarity during the incident was primarily limited to Gwangju and Jeollanam-do, the diverse emotions and ideas that emerged there catalyzed a collective consciousness, propelling the May Movement to spread nationally and internationally to countries like Japan, Germany and the United States. It is crucial to recognize that the networks of international solidarity, already functioning in various forms since the 1970s, played a critical role and were significantly mobilized during the May Movement.

Since the 2000s, international solidarity concerning the May 18 Uprising has become the role of the Foundation. Over the past 24 years, international solidarity projects have become its important part. These projects have experienced fluctuating fortunes, sometimes faltering and sometimes facing challenges, amidst evolving and dynamic relationships both within and between organizations, Gwangju, Jeollanam-do, South Korea, Asia and over the globe. The Foundation is now at a pivotal juncture, tasked with defining its future identity and the direction of its international solidarity projects. It is imperative to adopt a structural and comprehensive approach to these projects, meticulously planning, evaluating and revising each project. Lastly, this article intends to offer a preliminary examination of the prospects for the international solidarity projects of the Foundation, while recognizing its inherent limitations.

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## Interview Materials

Chan-Ho Kim (Nov 16, 2023), Youngmi Yang (Dec 1, 2023), Ki-bong Lee (Mar 8, 2024)