

**“FIVE BANDITS” (1970)**  
By Kim Chiha

**Introduction**

The pattern of South Korean development under Pak Chŏnghŭi (Park Chung Hee, 1917-1979) and his successor in the 1980s, Chun Doo-Hwan (Jeun Du-hwan, b. 1931), met strong resistance from students, laborers, farmers, religious organizations, and others who felt that Korea’s export-led growth (often conditioned on cheap labor) benefited the wealthy, corporations, and the state while exploiting the majority of the populace. One famous poetic expression of discontent came in the form of a satirical poem, “Five Bandits” (Ojŏk), written by Kim Chiha (Kim Ji-ha, b. 1941) and published in 1970. Kim’s poem adopted stylistic features of *p’ansori*, a traditional mode of oral performance that often had its own ribald and satirical elements; such use of traditional folk culture would become central to oppositional movements by the 1980s. For this and other poems, Kim was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured as an alleged North Korean agent; later, in 1974, he would be sentenced to death for advocating rebellion, though he was eventually released because of heavy international pressure on the Pak government.

**Document Excerpts with Questions** (Longer selection follows this section)

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... Like slave-masters of olden times, they drive the people to work harder and longer, with the beating of burst drums and the sounds of broken trumpets, with one aim in mind: to increase their own wealth.

**Question:**

1. How does Kim characterize the government of South Korea?

**Longer Selection with Questions**

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The spring sun was warm, the day pleasant, the wind gentle, the clouds floating by. The five bandits, each brandishing a golf club, each determined to win, set out to display their miraculous skills. The first bandit stepped forth, the one called the business tycoon, wearing a custom-made suit tailored of bank-notes, a hat made of banknotes, shoes made of banknotes and gloves knitted of banknotes, with a gold watch, gold rings, gold buttons, a gold necktie pin, gold cuff links, a gold buckle, golden teeth, golden nails, golden toenails, and golden zippers, with a golden watch chain dangling from his wiggling ass.

...

Now the second bandit steps forth with his cronies from the National Assembly. Here come hunchbacks, alley foxes, angry dogs, and monkeys. Hunched at the waist, their eyes are as narrow and slanted as Ts’ao Ts’ao.<sup>1</sup> Lumbering, rasping, covering their hairy bodies with the empty oaths of revolution, coughing up mucus, raising their golf clubs high into the sky like flags, thunderously yelling slogans, rolling on viper-colored jagged floors:

Revolution, from old evil to new evil!

Renovation, from illegal profiteering to profiteering illegally!

Modernization, from unfair elections to elections unfair!

...

Now the third bandit emerges, looking like a rubber balloon with viperous pointed eyes, his lips firmly closed. Portraying a clean government official, when sweets are offered, he shows that he doesn’t like them by shaking his head. Indeed, it must be true. But look at this fellow’s other face. He snoops here and smiles there, stout, impudent, sly; his teeth are crooked and black from an over indulgence in sweets, worn out until they could decay no more.

He sits in a wide chair as deep as the sea, before a desk as high as the sky, saying “no thank you” with one hand and “thank you” with the other. He cannot do possible things, but he can do impossible things; he has piles of documents on top of his desk and bundles of money under it. He acts like an obedient shaggy dog when flattering superiors, but like a snarling hunting dog to subordinates. He puts public funds into his left pocket and bribes for favors done into his right pocket. His face, a perpetual mask of innocence, conveys purity—the purity

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<sup>1</sup> Ts’ao Ts’ao (155-220), Emperor Wu of Wei. Generalissimo and chancellor during the declining years of the Later Han dynasty; he was known for ruthlessness.

of a white cloud. His all-consuming passion is asking after the wellbeing of madams of deluxe restaurants.

The fourth bandit steps forth, a big gorilla. He is tall, reaching almost to the heavens. The marching column of soldiers under his command is as long as China’s Great Wall. He has white tinted eyes, a tiger’s mouth, a wide nose, and a shaggy beard; he must be an animal. His breast is adorned with colorful medals made of gold, silver, white copper, bronze, and brass. Black pistols cling to his body.

He sold the sacks of rice meant to feed the soldiers, and filled the sacks with sand. He stole the cows and pigs to be fed to the soldiers, and gave a hair to each man. No barracks for the poor enlisted men in a bitterly cold winter; instead, hard labor all day to keep them sweating. Lumber for the construction of barracks was used for building the general’s quarters. Spare parts for vehicles, uniforms, anthracite briquettes, monthly allowances, all were stolen. In accordance with military law, soldiers who deserted their units because of hunger and desperation were arrested, beaten and thrown into the brig, and harassed under orders. University students summoned for military service were assigned to the general’s quarters as living toys for his wanton wife. Meanwhile the general enjoyed his cleverly camouflaged life with an unending stream of concubines.

Now the last bandit and his cronies step out: ministers and vice ministers, who waddle from obesity, sediment seeping from every pore. With shifty mucus-lined eyes, they command the national defense with golf clubs in their left hands, while fondling the tits of their mistresses with their right. And, when they softly write “Increased Production, Increased Export and Construction” on a mistress’s tits, the woman murmurs “Hee-hee-hee, don’t tickle me!” And they jokingly reproach: “You ignorant woman, do national affairs make you laugh?” Let’s export even though we starve, let’s increase production even though products go unsold. Let’s construct a bridge across the Strait of Korea with the bones of those who have starved to death, so we can worship the god of Japan! Like slave-masters of olden times, they drive the people to work harder and longer, with the beating of burst drums and the sounds of broken trumpets, with one aim in mind: to increase their own wealth.

**Questions:**

1. How does Kim characterize the government of South Korea?
2. Who are the “five bandits,” and what are their crimes?
3. The second bandit offers a series of slogans: “revolution, from old evil to new evil,” etc. What satirical comment is being made here about the Pak Chōnghŭi government’s rhetorical emphasis on economic, social, and political development?
4. The poem is often quite vulgar, with much attention to sex, bodies and their characteristics or functions, etc. Why? How does this work as political satire?