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Roads Untraveled: Redefining “democracy” through the 2016 protest movement in Korea

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Abstract

This study takes a close examination of the Saturday protest movement in Korea and explores how the politics by social movements challenges the extant theorization of democratization. The paper begins with a brief description of the presidential scandal, the eruption of massive protests, and its impact on formal politics. By situating the Korean case in a comparative theoretical discussion, it engages with important debates in the latest scholarship of democracy that complicate given assumptions and conceptualization. The paper closes with theoretical suggestions of how the Korean drama of protest movements contributes to altering the imagination of democratic politics, both conceptually and substantively.

Keywords

Democracy, protest, social movements, South Korea, democratic theory

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I. Introduction

2016 was a tough year for students of democracy. Political developments in many parts of the world made us question what democracy is from the standpoint of as we know it. In a referendum in June, Britain's older, less educated, and rural voters voted for the Brexit. In the following month, a military coup against authoritarian president Erdogan in Turkey ended in a failed attempt, only to be followed by a massive purge of political opponents. The Hungarian government under Fidesz, a far-right-wing party in power since 2010, continued to destroy checks and balances in democratic institutions. Democratically elected president Duterte in the Philippines killed over 6,000 civilians in his war against drugs during his first six months in office.[1] In November, America's Electoral College, an institution put into place since the 18th century, enabled white, older, rural Americans to deliver the presidency to Donald Trump against Hillary Clinton who gained more popular votes. And there was the Park Geun-hye & Choi Soon-sil scandal in South Korea (Korea hereafter), which questioned who the real president was that citizens voted in office.

While these political developments are just a few excerpts of world events in 2016, they demonstrate that we may have entered a new era, although not unprecedented, which betrays our traditional understanding of democracy. Are the boundaries of democracy and authoritarianism as clear-cut as we often assume? Do democratic procedures, such as referendums and free and fair elections, produce democratic outcomes in times of huge socioeconomic distress? When democratically elected leaders use means of coercion to impose harm on citizens and to destroy the very democratic institutions that brought them to power, what political mechanisms can put a halt to such reversals other than waiting until the next election? Is democratic consolidation a valid notion when backtracking to illiberal politics is widely observed among both the old and young democracies? What meaningful intervention can popular protest in this era of democratic reversal bring to substantiate the incomplete "contract" between voters who give mandate to their representatives and the elected who betray the mandate? How does the Korean protest movement in 2016 and 2017 inform the students of democracy to revise the accepted tenets of democratic theories?

This study intends to discuss these questions through a close examination of the political upheaval that occurred in Korea in 2016 and that continues to unfold in 2017. The paper begins with a brief description of the presidential scandal, the eruption of massive protests, and its impact on formal politics. By situating the Korean case in a comparative theoretical discussion, it engages with important debates in the latest scholarship of democracy, which complicate given assumptions and conceptualization. The paper closes with theoretical suggestions of how the Korean drama of protest movements contributes to altering the horizons of democratic politics, both conceptually and substantively. Ultimately this study advances that the prevalent notions of

[1] Aljazeera, 16 December 2016: http://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/asia/2016/12/duterte-drug-war-death-toll-6000-161213132427022.html

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democracy and democratization remain incomplete and porous and the experience of Korean politics highlights the theoretical limitations. Korea's candlelight rallies demonstrate a new modality of democratic representation, particularly with their efficacious intervention in formal institutions and their broadened imagination of democracy to include material equality and social justice.

II. The Park-Choi Scandal and the Saturday protest

When Park Geun-hye was elected president in December 2012, many were shocked to accept that 52 percent of voters chose the daughter of former military dictator Park Chung-hee, even after five years under the conservative president Lee Myeong-bak who severely damaged and reversed the hard-won democracy in the nation. Once in office, President Park insulated herself from the public and refused to engage with political opposition. Instead, she unilaterally pushed for unpopular and destructive policy agenda such as banning the United Progressive Party, closing the Kaeseong Industrial Complex, introducing the state-approved history textbook, signing a "final and irreversible" agreement on the comfort women issue with Japan, and welcoming the US' installment of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) system on South Korean soil.

The extent of President Park's detachment from the public and executive incompetency was unabashedly revealed by the Sewol disaster in April 2014 when the government rescue mission completely failed to save the passengers trapped in the sinking ferry. At the same time, the government was increasingly relying on repressive measures to undermine media freedom and to silence political dissent, methods that were not unfamiliar to citizens who experienced her father's draconian rule decades ago.

In the backdrop of growing popular discontent and suspicion about President Park's ability to govern, a confidential Blue House document that identified three key figures to be controlling Park Geun-hye and presidential affairs was leaked to Segye Ilbo in November 2014.[2] A full-scale investigation on this serious irregularity in the presidential office was aborted at the time. It was almost two years later in September 2016 when the severity of this irregularity resurfaced with media reporting on the college admission of Choi Soon-sil (president Park's confidante)'s daughter to Ehwa University. What ignited popular anger was not just that university administrators and professors violated admissions rule to secure Choi's daughter's admission as an equestrian competitor, but also the fact that Choi Soon-sil used her influence to pressure Samsung, Korea's most powerful conglomerate group, to pay billions of Korean won for her daughter's horse. Further investigative reporting as well as formal investigation by special prosecutors have found out the following: Ms. Choi who holds no public office was deeply involved in maneuvering President Park's decisions

[2] The three figures are Jeong Ho-seong, Lee Jae-man, and Ahn Bong-geun, three presidential staff who were put into the position by Jeong Yoon-hoi, Choi Soon-sil's ex-husband and president Park's former chief of staff. He is known to have controlled President Park for many decades.

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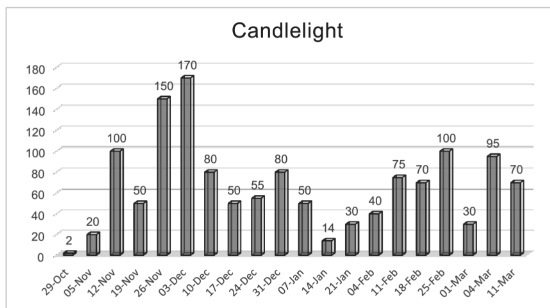
and policies. She used her influence to pressure large conglomerates to donate KRW 80 billion (or USD 70 million) to suspicious foundations she created to offer an institutional asylum for President Park after retirement. In exchange, chaebols were guaranteed with policy concessions or a pass to get around their unlawful activities. The presidential office also created a blacklist of over 9,000 artists and scholars who were critical of Park and removed those blacklisted from funding and other opportunities.[3]

In short, the president that Korean voters elected into office had relegated her constitutional duties to a personal friend who then used her power to secure personal gains by bypassing formal institutions and thwarting the rule of law.

In reaction to such an unheard scandal that breached constitutional rule, civil society organized its first candlelight protest on October 29, which attracted a humble number of 20,000 participants. As more dumbfounding stories of the corruption scandal were aired in media outlets, especially JTBC, the size of the protest snowballed to an unprecedented scale and tenacity in the following Saturdays.[4] Table 1 shows the number of protest participants in Gwanghwamoon Square in Seoul, where the candlelight rally has since been held every Saturday. While the most widely shared slogan in the earlier protests was voluntary resignation of President Park, the collective voice evolved to demand the National Assembly's active move to impeach the president as madam president failed to show her comprehension of the political aberration. The rally on December 3 marked the peak, in which 1.7 million citizens (about 3.4 percent of Korean population) made themselves present to demonstrate their unwavering dissent. This scale recorded the largest protest in the republic's history by surpassing the size of the mass gathering on July 7, 1987, the high

Table 1. The Scale of Saturday Protest (in 10,000)



Source: Collected by the author based on news reporting after every Saturday protest

[3] In legal terms, the investigation by the National Assembly and by special prosecutors identifies that President Park, Choi Soon- sil, past and present presidential staff, cabinet ministers, and the CEOs of 9 chaebols are involved in criminal cases of bribery, abuse of official authority, coercion, and leakage of confidential documents in defense, foreign, and other public affairs.
[4] On October 24, JTBC journalists found a tablet PC previous used by Ms. Choi and broadcasted electronic evidence that showed Choi's involvement in presidential affairs.

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time of democratic transition in Korea. Candlelight protests in the winter of 2016 did not occur only in Seoul but also in other major cities across the nation and around the globe. In the month of November last year, it is identified that protest rallies were held in about 70 cities in over 26 countries (OhmyNews, 5 December 2016).[5]

It was not only the scale of the protest that was unprecedented, but also the diversity of participants, the variety of political demands, and the ingenuity expressed in protest methods and culture that were spectacular to inspire the participants themselves and observers, both local and international. Citizens of all walks of life and age took part in the protest and social media played an instrumental role in spreading news and updates on the unfolding scandal as well as the Saturday protests. Every protest turned into an exhibition arena for creative renditions of the candlelight symbol, artful usage of post-it messages with political demands, and witty inventions of protest pickets and flags. Protesters showed consistent adherence to non-violence and order to the extent of voluntarily cleaning the streets and picking up garbage after each protest. "South Koreans are really good at protesting" was the title of a Youtube footage put together by Quartzs to describe the phenomenal protest culture made by millions of Koreans (November 30, 2016).[6]

While individual and family-based participation was more common than organizational mobilization, the Saturday protest was far from a spontaneous unorganized event. Civil society was swift to form the People's Action for Immediate Resignation of President Park or People's Action in short (toijin haengdong in Korean) as an umbrella group of 2,300 civic organizations to coordinate their action for mass demonstrations (People's Action website).[7] The People's Action sets the agenda for each rally based on the suggestions and feedback from citizens, prepares the protest logistics including the stage and audiovisual equipment at Gwanghwamoon Square, arranges speakers and artists for performance, and collects donations from individuals and organizations to finance the protest expenses. Such seamless organization of mega rallies is unthinkable without the movement infrastructure and expertise that Korean civic groups have accumulated over the past decades of contentious politics. Korean social movements are characterized by a large number of professional activists and staff, connections to grassroots causes, and the organizational form of an umbrella organization, which together enable them to engage in national political agenda and to mobilize nationwide protests (Lee 2014). It is this movement infrastructure that originated from the past experience of forming a "democratic united front" against authoritarian regimes through active networking among college students, dissident intellectuals, industrial workers, and religious groups, which has contributed to effective and sustained protests.

The ongoing protest that takes place in Gwanghwamoon Square every Saturday represents two crucial aspects of the Korean political process. First, contentious politics, or the "square poli-

[5] http://m.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/Mobile/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0002267398#cb
[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_VLWeIgOlA
[7] http://www.bisang2016.net

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tics" as Koreans would call it, continues to be an instrumental mechanism through which citizens articulate and aggregate their political agenda. Protestors' demands are not limited to bringing President Park and her cliques to legal justice but expand to call a fundamental shift in the status quo of the political system. Framed in the language of "jeokpye" (deep-rooted vices), citizens are pointing the deep-seated predicaments created and reinforced by the yet-persistent-ancient-regime to be the ultimate limitations of Korean democracy. According to People's Action, the jeokpye include democracy without equality like the unbridled power of the chaebol and the expansion of anti-labor laws, state failures at public safety and accountability like in the case of the Sewol disaster, the haunting persistence of authoritarian politics like government sponsored history textbooks, blacklisting of dissidents, and muzzling of the press, and the occasions of subservient diplomatic relations like the agreement with Japan over the "comfort women" issue and the questionable installation of the American project of THAAD (People's Action website).[8] In other words, the candlelight protest offers an arena where citizens come out to directly express their profound frustration with the status quo while voicing rich imaginations of where Korean society should aim for after eliminating the old vices.

Another important implication of the Saturday protest is its direct impact on formal political processes. First, the powerful demonstration of the people's call to oust President Park placed tremendous pressure on elected politicians to take institutional actions to remove the president from office. At first, lawmakers responded in a modest manner by taking the legislative action of passing an act for the investigation of the administration on November 17. Yet, both the Saenuri Party (conservative party) and the Minju Party (center-left party) took a lukewarm, if not confused, reaction to the unfolding presidential scandal and stayed disorganized in their reaction. The growing magnitude of popular revolt, particularly the one expressed in the protest on November 26 with 1.5 million citizens, sent a strong signal to the National Assembly and guided opposition lawmakers to initiate the impeachment move on December 2. Citizens' sustained mobilization and pressure changed the calculation of elected politicians and finally enabled the passage of the impeachment a week later, with 234 approvals out of 299 present lawmakers including 68 approvals by Saenuri lawmakers. The National Assembly further agreed to appoint special prosecutors to conduct a thorough investigation of President Park's criminal case.

The second noteworthy outcome brought about by nationwide protests is its impact on restructuring the conservative camp. Facing growing unpopularity of the president and the president's party, a partisan crisis brewed within the Saenuri Party eventually leading to a party split. A few weeks after the passage of the impeachment move, 30 Saenuri Party lawmakers left the party and formed a new conservative party, the Righteous Party. This marks a major divide within the conservative camp in recent years. The Saenuri Party, too, was compelled to conduct a facial makeover

[8] http://www.bisang2016.net

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by renaming itself to the Liberal Korea Party, a customary move of Korean political parties when faced with rising disapproval rates. Alongside the party split and renaming on the conservative side, the far-right groups began to organize counter-protests just next to the Gwanghwamoon rallies. Beginning on November 9, Korea's "New Right" extremists mobilized elderly citizens and evangelical Christians by calling their action as "taegeukki (national flag) protest."[9] These protestors in their 60s and older hold the Korean flag and the American flag as their collective symbols and make extreme political claims, often times provoking violent clashes as well. Their demand included the drop of the presidential impeachment case and even the president's call for martial law. From the extremists' perspective, President Park is the savior of the nation under chaos while the participants in the candlelight protests are pro-North Korean commies who are creating the national turbulence. The tenacious mobilization of the far-right older generation and their vitriolic political claims reveal the historical specificities of Korean conservatives which reflect the imprints of black-and-white Cold-War mentality and military dictatorships' indoctrination.

Yet, the persistent Saturday protest continued to gather a disproportionally larger number of participants to send a strong signal of support for formal institutional actors such as special prosecutors and the Constitutional Court judges. Against the rise of far-right mobilization to threaten the actions of formal institutions, the Saturday protest continued through the most treacherous winter weekends to cheer for the special prosecutors to conduct thorough and impartial investigation of the criminal case that involves the incumbent president and powerful chaebols like Samsung, once regarded as impervious to criminal charges, and to alarm the Constitutional Court for its timely procession to reach the final ruling. The prosecutors' filing of investigation under detention for Jae-yong Lee (the CEO of Samsung) and the court's decision to grant the case on February 9, 2017 was not just a matter of legal judgement but more so a judicial action that reflects the uncooling pressure for justice from the public. Finally, the Constitutional Court delivered its unanimous ruling on March 10 to approve the National Assembly's impeachment of President Park. As of this writing, the stipulated term of special prosecutors has come to an end and the criminal investigation of Ms. Park, now a private citizen, has been handed over to the prosecutor's office.

III. Revising democratic theories and the Korean case

At one point, South Korea's economic and political transformation was regarded as an exemplary case that showcases the theoretical validity of the modernization thesis and regime transitology formulated by Western scholarship. The nation's phenomenal industrialization and rising material affluence was followed by a regime transition from decades-long dictatorships to liberal democracy. The transfer of power between authoritarian successors and democratic challengers in 1998-

[9] They formed a network of 50 conservative groups named Tangigook on December 11. The Federation of Korean Industries, the major organization of Korean capitalists, is known to have funded these far-right groups to be dispersed to the elderly protestors as a daily activity fee (Hankyoreh Shinmun, 6 February 2017).

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2007 seemed to further strengthen the theoretical expectation of “democratic consolidation.” However, the political unfolding with the return of conservatives to power in 2007 began to shatter the textbook case of the democratization school. By any measure of democracy, both the procedural and substantive aspects of democratic rule have all backslid in the decade under Presidents Lee and Park. The Freedom House Index, for instance, downgraded Korea’s democratic-ness that was 1 (most free) in 2005 to 1.5 in 2013 and further to 2 in 2014 (Freedom House 2017). Korea was demoted from a full democracy to a flawed democracy in 2015 by the Economic Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index as well.[10] Other international indicators such as Reporters Without Borders’ Press Freedom Index and Transparency International’s Corruption Index concur in reflecting such reversals of Korean democracy in their measures.

Yet, Korea is not alone in challenging the dominant knowledge on democracy and democratization. As the cases sampled in the opening of the paper, instances of aberrations are abound. These developments directly contradict the expectations by democracy scholars like Seymour Martin Lipset who maintained that modernization and political development was rather unidirectional. Democratization was presumed to be an inevitable end result when the prerequisites, most notably economic development, were met (Lipset 1994). Adam Przeworski and his companion demonstrated the validity of the modernization thesis through multiple statistical exercises. Their findings concluded that while democratic transition may occur at various stages of economic growth, the one that takes place after the economy reaching per capita income of USD 6,000 is most likely to consolidate and stay proof from an authoritarian reversal (Przeworski and Limongi 1997). By the same line of thought, democracies were to be consolidated, preempting the possibility of going back to old dictatorial practices. “Democratic consolidation” was a concept proposed by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan during the heyday of the third wave democratization to reaffirm the one-way travel of transitions. They foresaw that as democracy settles as the “only game in town” authoritarian alternatives are precluded and thus democratic politics is consolidated (1996).

To the despair of the aspirants of democratization, however, empirical realities observed in various corners of the globe told a story of dubious transitions. Instead of democratic consolidation, societies were bound by incomplete democratization, fuzzy coexistence of elections and dictatorial practices, and even autocratic reversals. Democracy scholarship had to be revised. First, the conceptual artifact of “democratic transition” that was premised on two prototypical regime types of autocracy and democracy was questioned. Scholars moved away from such a simplistic dichotomy and recognized a third category termed as competitive authoritarian regimes, dominant-party regimes, mixed or hybrid regimes, or illiberal democracy (Brownlee 2007, Levitsky and Way 2010, Magaloni and Kricheli 2010, Trejo 2014, Foa and Mounk 2017). An important insight of this conceptual revision is to acknowledge that transitions are neither teleological nor one-way in their di-

[10] https://infographics.economist.com/2017/DemocracyIndex/

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rection. States may go only half-way in regime transition by introducing competitive elections while sustaining other repressive measures to circumvent substantive political change. Powerful actors of the authoritarian era may persist and quasi-democratic regimes may enjoy continued longevity. In other cases, democratic breakthroughs would be followed by authoritarian reversals and vice versa, making democratic consolidation out of reach.

In studying reversed transitions, Nancy Bermeo identifies several possible mechanisms of democratic backsliding (2016). Political elites use military coups in the name of promising democratic restoration, aggrandize the executive to undercut checks on executive power (most frequently targeting media freedoms and judicial autonomy), and/or engage in strategic manipulation of elections. The danger of this backsliding process is that it accompanies the destruction of basic republican norms such as respect of the law, acceptance of the legitimacy of political opponents, and tolerance of disagreeable speech (Rauch 2017). Cases of democratic regression further suggest that democracies are prone to democratic de-consolidation as much as they were once able to head for the route of consolidation (Foa and Mounk 2017). Democracy is found to be much less stable than we often assume, especially in times of economic and social distress. Betraying the expectations of Lipset or Przeworski and Limongi, democratic de-consolidation is observed both in old democracies and new democracies that have reached a certain level of modernization or material affluence.

A growing number of stunted and relapsing democracies that go against the existing theories of democracy beg for an explanation. Scholars put their finger on neoliberal globalization with which state institutions are reconfigured and the general public are increasingly facing new anxieties. Scholars like David Harvey have warned about democratic decay in the neoliberal era. Neoliberal adherents see democracy as an inefficient and costly political enterprise in their pursuit of creating an environment for good business and investment and advocate for governance by experts and elites and by executive order and judicial decision (Harvey 2005, 66). Colin Crouch coined such democratic reversals as “post-democracy” under which democratic governance falls into small circles of a political-economic elite (2004). The revolving doors in Washington politics, or similar practices in other countries, show how special interests are able to capture political institutions to design policies that suit their firms and use taxpayers’ money to rescue firms when they are in trouble. Concurrent with the rise of special interests is the state’s increasing reliance on authoritarian measures to enforce the neoliberal agenda (Harvey 2005). Growing instances of coercive surveillance and rising rates of incarceration are familiar outcomes observed in many neoliberal states.

Yet such democratic reversals are not generated only by the political elite who are in charge of pushing for neoliberal agenda but also by the electorate’s side as well. David Harvey has cautioned about the rise of extreme ideas such as nationalist populism, longing for authoritarian leadership, and religious fundamentalism among the public as a way to address the woes of neoliberal degradation (2005). Especially for those who stand on the losing side of neoliberal expansion,

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anxieties grow and a search for unwarranted blame and hypothetical threats run wild. Many individuals who see the prospect of rising living standards as untenable, experience rising inequality between the economic winners and losers and desire to put the blame on ethnic and racial others (Rauch 2017).[11]

Public anxieties are manifested in their declining support for democratic institutions as well as their rising support for authoritarian alternatives. Withdrawal of democratic norms is found to be more pronounced among the young and the affluent. For instance, Americans who state that it is essential to live in a democracy stands at 70 percent among those born before World War II but drops to 30 percent for those born after 1980 (Foa and Mounk 2017). This is not an isolated development in the US but a more universal phenomenon observed across many parts of the world. The proportion of citizens who approve “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament or elections” has risen in the last twenty years in most counties included in the World Values Survey (Foa and Mounk 2017). It is not a coincidence this period overlaps with the era reshaped by neoliberal globalization. The antidemocratic backslash reflected in survey findings is closely tied to anxieties brewed in the process of globalization over the last few decades. As a sizable group of the disenchanted electorate loses faith in democratic institutions, they become attracted to authoritarian alternatives and vote for anti-systemic elites who foster illiberal politics as the one described above (Foa and Mounk 2017, 9). This is what Foa and Mounk call democratic de-consolidation.

In short, the winding paths of democratization and un-democratization challenge the widely accepted notions of the democracy scholarship and require a revised understanding of democratic politics particularly in times of economic distress and uncertainties. Particularly noteworthy revisions include a more nuanced conceptualization of regime types and the theoretical recognition of the complex pendulum of democratization such as post-democracy, democratic backsliding, and de-consolidation. Then, what new insights can be learned from the Korean case of democratic politics and popular mobilization to redefine our conceptual approach to a representative democracy?

IV. The candlelight protest and democratic re-imagination

The Saturday protest of 2016-2017 demonstrates that street politics or politics by social movements is the dominant form of Korean political process through which various political interests are articulated and political change is created. It has been the sustained mobilization of citizens that shaped the actions of formal institutions including elected politicians, political parties, and

[11] For instance, Mark Muro and Sifan Liu of Brookings Institution show that Hillary Clinton carried only 472 counties in the 2016 presidential race, which were predominantly urban out of more than 3,000 counties. These counties produced almost two-thirds of America’s economic output (“Another Clinton-Trump divide: High-output America vs low-output America,” 29 November 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2016/11/29/another-clinton-trump-divide-high-output-america-vs-low-output-america/)

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judicial authorities. It was through the protest that citizens articulated and aggregated their political demands. This is not the first time that Koreans enabled a major political change made by people power as there are a number of historical experiences, most notably the political transformation from military rule to democratic politics in 1987. Social movement organizations are widely present and the infrastructure for contentious politics is well-developed in Korean society. In this process, citizens have gained a high level of political efficacy exercised through protest activism.

For some keen observers of Korean politics, however, this politics by social movements is not an ideal equilibrium for a representative democracy. For instance, Choi Jang-jip has constantly argued that the weakness of political parties is the Achilles' heel of Korean democracy and that the lack of programmatic competition among parties is the source that impairs the representative institution (Choi 2002). From this perspective, the focus of political energy should be placed on building programmatic and institutionalized political parties (especially left parties to represent labor agenda) to reach the ideal of democratic politics in Korea. Yet, this theoretical suggestion seems to repeat the language of modernization and transitology, which is premised on the notion of symmetrical development (Chatterjee 2011). In other words, the components that form modernization or democratization, such as industrialization, the middle class, political pluralism by political parties, civil society, and welfare state, are expected to emerge concurrently everywhere in the process of modern state building but only with a time lag. What happened in the democratization trajectory in the West is expected to be repeated in the Rest (regions other than the West) several years or decades later. If this political trajectory is not repeated, it is just a matter of "not yet" and if some components are missing in this pathway, the political development in the Rest is regarded as imperfect, deficient, deformed, or failed (Chakrabarty 2000).

However, such a teleological and "not yet" narrative forms an ahistorical account of political development by ignoring the historical specificities that constitute each polity in different ways. The historical experience of Korean politics has shown that the central actors and political mechanisms through which major political change is made are different from those experienced in earlier democracies. This difference does not imply a lacking or deficiency from the standard modalities (if there is such a thing) of Western democratic process. Political dynamics in Korea should be approached "as is," representing another trajectory or possibility of democratic politics that is different from others. This proposition concurs with some methodological revisions made in political sociology such as the evolutionary approach proposed by Sven Steinmo (2010). Steinmo criticizes the methodological enterprise prevalent in social sciences by arguing that viewing the social world as being made of discrete "independent" variables is an ontological fallacy. Instead, he suggests that scholars should take history seriously and acknowledge when and where something occurs fundamentally shapes what occurs afterwards (Steinmo 2010, 9-14). In other words, politics by social movements and weak political parties are inseparable twins that have co-evolved in the political dynamics of Korean democracy. Postcolonial Cold War context in Korea offered a different ground

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for the emergence of political parties by limiting them into a secondary political institution within authoritarian regimes led by a single autocrat and security apparatuses (Lee 2014). The gravity of political opposition was formed around contentious social movements and further undermined the space for party politics.

Therefore, it needs to be fairly acknowledged that politics that emerge out of different historical contexts in different times bears different kinds of components of modernity and democracy. There are alternative avenues through which citizens exercise power along with formal political process and political parties. Scholars like Rosanvallon names this politics as "counter-democracy" to identify alternative means of democratic process that citizens use such as active monitoring of the behavior of elected politicians, frequent mobilization of resistance, and strategic use of the court to bring elites into juridical evaluation (2008). A similar theorization of alternative democratic politics is also found in "insurgent citizenship," which denotes to the contentious mobilization of citizens to address issues of inequality and unfairness within the democratic process (Holston 2008). Hence, Korea's candlelight protest and its impact on reshaping formal political institutions and their practices should be viewed as a novel modality of democratic politics that requires innovative theorization.

The political dynamics observed in Korea further belies the chronological framework assumed in Western scholarship. Social movements literature suggests that the primary focus of civil society progresses from industrial (primarily focused on economic issues) to post-industrial agenda (addressing life-style issues). Yet, issues voiced in the Saturday protest in the language of jeokpye include both the traditional issues of labor and economic justice and new agenda that speaks to a multitude of hierarchies and inequalities in social relations. While Korea has definitely entered a post-industrial society by the material standard, it is loaded with a complex mix of old and new woes and thus defies the transition from old to new social movements. Furthermore, the sequential order from the developmental to neoliberal political economy fails to explain which segment of the population is activated for mobilization for what reasons. The elderly citizens filling the far-right protests do not represent the anxieties created by a neoliberal economy but rather the resilient haunting of Cold War politics that champions an anti-communist dictatorial leader, the American ally, and evangelical Christianity. Korea's candlelight protests also show a different relationship between neoliberal globalization and citizens' support for democracy. Inequalities and uncertainties created by neoliberal market forces are not fueling citizens' withdrawal from democratic norms but instead contribute to expanding the meaning of democracy to include economic democratization.

Most fundamentally, the protest movement in Korea pinpoints the theoretical shallowness of democracy scholarship and transition literature. Both democracy and democratic transitions are such a minimal and fuzzy concept. While Western precedents may desire the replication of an essentialist form of representative democracy in other parts of the world, democratic politics is highly fluent and malleable that defies a universalist form. Democratic transitions, too, fail to see

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the perseverance of the old guards and their die-hard authoritarian practices that make successful reincarnations under the veil of democracy. The political dynamics unfolding in Korea just aptly demonstrates the inadequacies of existing democracy theories. It further contributes to altering the imaginations of democratic politics by identifying multiple disjunctures that exist in given political hierarchies. Direct voices of citizens uncover the multitude of unfairness, injustices, and inequalities that need to be addressed in the name of democracy. Korean protests are opening new pathways of democracy, both conceptually and substantively.

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