

## **Development of Democratization Movement in South Korea**

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### **1. Historical Conditions for Development of South Korean Democracy and 'Democracy by Movement'**

The contemporary history of South Korea covers the period of slightly over sixty years from the nation's liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945 through 2008. During this rather short period, however, South Korea has achieved the major goals of modernization, such as the foundation of a post-colonial independent state, the rapid industrialization, and the democratization of the authoritarian regime. Considering these achievements, it was a period of compressed modernization, where the tasks of modernization were carried out within a short period of time. The results of such compressed modernization were very fruitful.<sup>1</sup> Among many Third World countries that belatedly embarked on modernization, South Korea is a rare example of success.

The history of South Korean democracy, which is the subject of this paper, is parallel to the history of its compressed modernization. The reason is that South Korean democracy began as late as 1945 when the nation was liberated from by Japanese colonial rule, but has nevertheless progressed remarkably. Today, democracy in South Korea operates more successfully than in any other Third World country.

Despite the great achievements, however, the historical conditions for South Korean democracy were not favorable at the beginning. Rather, the conditions were extremely difficult because of the existence of a 'strong state' which had been built in modern Korean history. First of all, the strong state originated from an anticommunist state with strong coercive power, which was founded in postcolonial South Korea on the basis of the strong colonial state. As the Cold War intensified immediately after national liberation, Koreans experienced the ideological, political conflicts between the left and right during the post-liberation period and the subsequent Korean War, and those experiences created an environment where a strong anticommunist state could easily take root in South Korea. Furthermore, the strong state was even more strengthened by the fact that the anticommunist state was succeeded by a developmental state under dictatorial regimes, which resorted to extreme coercion and governmental competence in order to promote the

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<sup>1</sup>. However, Korea was divided during the state-building process that took place in the early stage of the Cold-War, and has not been reunited since then. The problem of inter-Korean reunification still remains as a task of modernization in South Korea.

compressed economic development.

After the Korean War the authoritarian rule under dictatorial regimes could last over a long period of time in South Korea because their rule was based on the strong state. However, their authoritarian rule caused protesters to join the democratization movement. The more their rule was strengthened and extended, the more the democratization movement spread. In addition, the profound social changes resulted from the successful compressed industrialization further increased demand for democratization. Consequently, confrontations continued between the dictatorial regimes' authoritarian rule and the democratization movement's resistance, and those confrontations recurrently caused massive clashes between both parties. Exemplary cases include the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution of 1960, the Gwangju Popular Uprising of 1980, and the June Democratic Uprising of 1987. In the end, the June Democratic Uprising put an end to authoritarian rule and paved the way for democratization. In this respect, South Korean democracy can be called 'democracy by movement,' at least with regard to the period preceding the transition to democracy in 1987.

## **2. Democratization Movement under Authoritarian Rule**

If South Korean democracy was 'democracy by movement' before the democratic transition in 1987, how did the democratization movement unfold concretely? It can be divided into three periods as follows; the first period is from national division and the Korean War to the 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution in 1960, when the democratization movement against Rhee Syng Man regime's anticommunist dictatorship began to surface. Then, the second period is from the May 16<sup>th</sup> Coup d'Etat in 1961 to the 'Spring of Seoul' in 1980, when the democratization movement was further developed and expanded in resistance to Park Chung Hee regime's development dictatorship. Lastly, the third period is from the December 12<sup>th</sup> Coup and the May 17<sup>th</sup> Coup launched by Chun Doo Hwan's neo-military forces to the June Democratic Uprising in 1987, when the democratization movement was so greatly enhanced that the authoritarian regime was democratized through the June Democratic Uprising.

### (1) Democratization Movement under Rhee Syng Man Regime

In order to understand the emergence of the democratization movement against dictatorship under the Rhee Syng Man regime, it is necessary to look into the ideological, political conflicts in the post-liberation period (August 1945 ~ August 1948) and the Korean War (June 1950 ~ July 1953), since those preexisting historical conditions contributed to the formation of an extreme anticommunist system in South Korea. The democratization movement began in protest against Rhee's anticommunist dictatorship based on the extreme anticommunist system.

After the Japanese surrender in August 1945, the liberated Korea was inspired with a dream to build a new independent state. During the post-liberation period, therefore, people from various areas participated in the movement to build a new state. Simultaneously, however, this era witnessed explosive conflicts over state-building among domestic political groups. Both left-wingers (backed by peasants and workers) and anticommunist right-wingers (backed by pro-Japanese Koreans) intended to build a state in each of their own ways. This conflict was further aggravated by the existence of the U. S. Military Government in the South and the Russian Military Government in the North, both of which were formed after Korea's liberation.

Under the political circumstances of the post-liberation period, the left made pioneering efforts to embark on state-building. They first established the Committee for the Preparation of Korean Independence, and then, founded the Korean People's Republic in haste. The result was that the People's Committees were set up in almost all cities and

counties of South Korea within a few months from the liberation(Bruce Cumings 1981, ch. 8). However, despite the left's preemptive actions taken in an earlier stage, the U. S. Occupation made a 'big reversal'(Choi Jang Jip 1996, 54-63; Jung Hae Gu 2001, 101-117) over a period of three years and eventually built an anticommunist state in South Korea. In an alliance with the conservatives, the U. S. Occupation could crush the initiative of the left in state-building by mobilizing the state's coercive power, including police forces. Consequently, the government of the Republic of Korea was established in the South in August 1948.

In terms of this, the anticommunist state that emerged in South Korea in August 1948 was a 'grafted state' in which the United States' interests in the Cold War anticommunism were fulfilled through the U. S. Occupation. As the Cold War rapidly intensified after the end of the Second World War, the United States wanted to consolidate a strong anticommunist system on the Korean Peninsula located at the forefront of the Cold War in East Asia, and its efforts led to the formation of a strong anticommunist state in South Korea under the initiative of the Occupation. Simultaneously, however, the United States also wanted to introduce liberal democratic institutions to the South because of geopolitical reasons. Since the Korean Peninsula was a symbolic place representing Cold War confrontations in East Asia, the South needed to show at least some aspects of liberal democracy in contrast with the North's communist system. In sum, the United States intended to build both a strong anticommunist system and liberal democratic institutions in South Korea. Of course, the former purpose was far more important than the latter.<sup>2</sup>

The anticommunist system in the South was further solidified around the time of the Korean War. First of all, after the inauguration of the South Korean government, the Rhee Syng Man regime removed middle-of-the-road nationalists as well as the left-wing forces, and also set up anticommunist organizations controlled by the government in various sectors of society. The result was the emergence of a far-right anticommunist system(Seo Joong Seok 1996). Another important point is that the number of South Korean forces skyrocketed to 600,000 due to the Korean War, which drastically increased the physical coercive power of the state. Furthermore, anticommunism became internalized in the minds of the people to a considerable degree through the experience in the Korean War. Shortly, the Korean War strengthened anticommunism as the ruling ideology of the state.

In sum, South Korea had an extreme anticommunist system which resulted from the conflicts in the post-liberation period and the subsequent Korean War. In this system, the anticommunist state wielded massive coercive power, while civil society was destroyed, weakened and controlled by the state. Its society was also an 'anticommunist regimented society'(Cho Hee Yeon 1998, 87-95) where anticommunism created a 'pseudo-consensus' in all fields of society. Of course, South Korea was equipped with liberal democratic institutions, but they were still merely formal and functioned mainly within the limits of the anticommunist system. In short, Rhee Syng Man's dictatorship in the 1950s was based on the extreme anticommunist system and the anticommunist regimented society. In this respect, it can be defined as an anticommunist dictatorship.

But the power of Rhee's anticommunist dictatorship started to wane as he sought to prolong his rule by the so-called "Selected Amendment Bill to the Constitution" in 1952 and also by the so-called "Rounding Off Amendment" in 1954. The reason was that

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<sup>2</sup>. This dual status of South Korea vis-a-vis the United States during the Cold War, which required both a strong anticommunist system and a liberal democratic system in the country, is often explained by the concept of the 'American Boundary'(Choi Jang Jip 1996, 22; Park Chan Pyo 1997,10).

Rhee's dictatorship and prolonged rule caused criticism and protest from below based on liberal democratic values and institutions. In the mid-1950s, new democratic opposition parties were formed to counterbalance Rhee's dictatorship. First of all, the Democratic Party was founded in September 1955. It was a conservative party, but clearly expressed its opposition to the dictatorship. In addition to the Democratic Party, progressive groups made efforts to establish the Progressive Party. In line with these changes in political system, the people also grew weary of Rhee's prolonged rule, as clearly shown in the 3<sup>rd</sup> presidential election held in May 1956. In this election, Candidate Jo Bong Am, who was Rhee Syng Man's archrival, won far more votes than expected.

Still, it was not democratic opposition parties but citizens' demonstrations against the rigged election that ultimately brought the fall of the Rhee Syng Man regime. All kinds of voting fraud occurred nationwide in the presidential election held in March 1960, and protesting demonstrations initiated by college students spread all across the country to force Rhee to resign from the presidency. This was the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution. Accordingly, the reasons for the collapse of Rhee's dictatorial regime lay in changes in the civil society of the time, rather than in democratic opposition parties. What kind of changes were taking place in South Korean civil society around the 1950s? And how did those changes lead to the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution?

First of all, South Korea underwent profound social changes due to sudden urbanization after the Korean War. Numerous people who had lost their homes and jobs during the war came to cities, and particularly to Seoul. As a result, the urban population increased from 3.47 million immediately after national liberation to 5.28 million as of 1955. Social changes also brought about an expansion of education. The number of entering students in elementary school increased almost by double, from 1.86 million in 1945 to 3.62 million in 1958(Seo Joong Seok 2005, 132-133). In particular, the number of university students swiftly increased by approximately 15 times, from 7,800 in 1945 up to 140,000 in 1961(Gwon Tae Jun 2006, 72). In addition, there was a huge increase in the influence of newspapers and other media in the 1950s, which greatly contributed to spreading public dissatisfaction and criticism of the dictatorial regime.

In conclusion, one may argue that journalists, intellectuals and college students constituted the 'critical public' in urban areas, including Seoul, during the late 1950s(Gwon Tae Jun 2006, 87). It heralded the emergence of a new civil society based on cities, unlike the agricultural society of the past. Although major industrialization was yet to come, the new civil society was being formed in South Korea, with Seoul and other big cities at the center. Therefore, the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution was based on the nascent urban civil society that had emerged in the late 1950s. It is also noteworthy that the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution was led by college students who were characteristically more sensitive to Rhee Syng Man's dictatorship than other social groups, and probably the only forces that could take massive collective actions at that time.

After all, the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution of 1960 heralded the beginning of the democratization movement from below in South Korea. The democratic institutions of the country were granted from above, and even they were reduced to mere formalities by the anticommunist dictatorship. Owing to the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution, however, democracy was reborn in the form of a democratization movement from below.

Yet, the democratic transition brought by the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution was to be crushed within a year, since Park Chung Hee's military regime seized power through the May 16<sup>th</sup> Coup d'Etat in 1961. Afterwards, the contemporary history of South Korea was to be filled with conflicts and confrontations between Park's military dictatorship and the democratization movement in resistance. Students and the military played leading roles in those conflicts and confrontations, who had emerged on the political scene through the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution and the May 16<sup>th</sup> Coup, respectively.

## (2) Democratization Movement under Park Chung Hee Regime

The Democratic Party took over the government after the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution, but was overthrown within a year by the May 16<sup>th</sup> Coup led by Park Chung Hee. The Democratic government came to power through the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution, but collapsed without a fight. This was an unexpected outcome considering the fact that the 'revolution from below' had been powerful enough to bring the fall of the Rhee Syng Man regime. Then, why was the Democratic government so easily overthrown? And why did Park's coup succeed without much difficulty?

One of the reasons for the fall of the Democratic government was their incompetence in ruling the country. After the April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution, they did not appropriately respond to various demands from below during the process of democratic transition, nor did they properly control the military that might set back the transition to democracy. At a more structural level, however, the reason for the fall of the Democratic government and Park's successful coup was the strong coercive power held by the military. The student-led April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution transferred power to a civilian government owing to the newly emerging civil society that had developed since the late 1950s, but the military was strong enough to counter the revolution because it monopolized physical coercive power. A group of army officers launched a coup on the grounds of 'chaos' of the transition period following the revolution, but the civilian government was not powerful enough to control it.

Having seized power by a military coup, the Park Chung Hee regime aggressively promoted economic development policies. As a result, the first Five-Year Economic Development Plan (1962~1966) based on export-oriented industrialization was successfully carried out, and the average annual growth rate of the Gross National Product ("GNP") was 8.3% in this period. The second Five-Year Economic Development Plan (1967~1971) was also very successful, and the average annual growth rate of GNP exceeded the original goal of 7.0% to reach 9.7% in this period. As a matter of fact, President Park lacked sufficient legitimacy in the earlier years of his rule because he had taken power through a coup. However, the success of his economic development plans offset the lack of legitimacy, as shown in his landslide win in the 1967 presidential election.

Despite the Park regime's economic achievements, the democratization movement was not interrupted during this period. The movement was dormant for a while after the May 16<sup>th</sup> Coup, but came to the surface with the struggle against the Korea-Japan Conference. Students and dissidents led a massive campaign from March 1964 to August 1965, protesting the government's attempt to normalize diplomatic relations with Japan in an obsequious manner. For this campaign, the opposition party and dissident leaders<sup>3</sup> formed the 'National Committee for Struggle against Humiliating Diplomacy toward Japan,' and students fought at the forefront of the struggle. Notably, students took a strong nationalist stance in the struggle against the Korea-Japan Conference. On the contrary, for the sake of economic development, the Park regime was more than willing to make a rough-and-ready settlement for the normalization of diplomatic relations with Japan which had once colonized Korea.

The struggle against the Korea-Japan Conference was followed by another struggle against President Park as he attempted to prolong his rule in the late 1960s. There was

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<sup>3</sup>. The dissident movement refers to a "movement based on notables who participate in the democratization movement outside the political part system, mainly in the fields of civil society and non-institutional political society"(Jung Hae Gu 2002, 389-390).

massive coordinated election fraud in the 7<sup>th</sup> general election held in June 1967, which was committed to prepare for a constitutional amendment that would allow Park to run for a third term as President. It provoked huge student demonstrations vehemently denouncing the rigged election. But Park pushed for a constitutional amendment to prolong his rule by using his economic achievements in 1969, and students launched a full-scale campaign against the constitutional amendment for Park's third term. For this campaign, the opposition party and dissident leaders made joint efforts once again to form the 'National Committee for Struggle against Constitutional Amendment,' and students fought at the forefront of the struggle, too. Despite their efforts, however, the constitutional amendment was passed by ruling party parliamentarians who secretly gathered in the third annex to the National Assembly building in September 1969.

At the end of the 1960s, while Park Chung Hee contrived to prolong his rule, inter-Korean relations were considerably aggravated, and the political situation was worsening on the Korean Peninsula. In January 1968, a Northern commando unit attempted to attack the Cheongwadae presidential compound, and the U. S. S. Pueblo, a U. S. navy spy ship, was captured by the North. North Korea also sent armed guerrillas to Uljin and Samcheok in November 1968, and shot down a U. S. Navy EC-121 in April 1969. Under the circumstances, the Park regime established the local army reserve corps, introduced the resident registration system, and increased military training for students for the ostensible purpose of protecting national security. These measures were taken to reinforce internal control by using the threats by the North.

As the regime reinforced internal control by using the worsening relations with the North, the democratization movement was expressed in the struggle against student military training and the movement to protect democracy in the early 1970s. First of all, the struggle against student military training began to oppose the intensified military training of students and the militarization of campus for the reason of national security. The democratization movement against student military training was carried out on every campus across the country during the first and second semesters of 1971. Parallel to this, the movement to protect democracy was also carried out with regard to election monitoring for the 7<sup>th</sup> presidential election to be held in 1971. Also in the same year, a group of judges publicly demanded the independence of the judiciary, professors at national universities made statements on the independence and self-regulation of the campus, and many others expressed their demand for democratization, too.

On the other hand, many incidents occurred in the early 1970s that showed the negative aspects of rapid industrialization. In 1971, Kim Jin Su, who was a union worker at Hanyoung Textile, was suspiciously murdered, and workers at Hanjin Corporation set fire to the Korean Air building owned by the company. More than a hundred thousand residents of the Gwangju Housing Complex protested against the city of Seoul. These incidents were preceded by the self-immolation of a worker named Jeon Tae Il, who had burnt himself to death in protest against the exploitation of labor and human rights abuse at the Pyeonghwa Market in November 1970. All of these revealed social problems hidden behind the process of industrialization and economic development. In this respect, the democratization movement of the early 1970s showed the fact that the movement dealt with social problems accumulated in the course of rapid industrialization, in addition to resistance to the Park regime's dictatorial rule and attempts to prolong it.

In this reality, the Park regime responded to protestors by denying their voices altogether. At the end of 1971, the government took a series of measures: the Garrison Act was invoked in October, a state of national emergency was declared in December, and the Act on Special Measures for National Security was legislated also in December. Furthermore, President Park made a special announcement to declare extraordinary martial law, and suspended the Constitution in October 1972. Then, the regime replaced the existing Constitution with the newly legislated Yushin Constitution, alleging that the

Yushin Constitution would strengthen the overall domestic structure in order to support talks with the North and a peaceful reunification in the rapidly changing international situation.

The 'rapidly changing international situation' referred to the international move toward detente surrounding the Korean Peninsula following the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, and 'talks with the North' referred to the South-North Red Cross Meeting held in the spirit of detente in the early 1970s. In fact, detente and inter-Korean talks could be reasons to relax the dictatorial system, but not reasons to reinforce it. Nonetheless, the Park regime intentionally implicated them with a national security crisis. There is no doubt that Park's ultimate purpose was to introduce the Yushin system, which was an even more repressive dictatorial system, under the pretense of national security.

Regardless of the Park regime's rhetoric, the advent of the Yushin system was primarily due to Park's avarice to prolong his one-man rule for his lifetime. In order to do so, he had amended the Constitution to run for a third term as President, and then, contrived to prolong his rule by an emergency measure. The Yushin system was an openly dictatorial system, where all powers were concentrated in the hands of the President. It also provided systemized measures necessary to prolong Park's power, such as indirect election of the President by a nominal institution named the National Congress for Reunification, the President's right to appoint one-third of the National Assembly, and the President's right to declare ultra-constitutional emergency provisions.

After the enforcement of the Yushin Constitution, the democratization movement was forced to be silent for a while. However, the silence did not last long, and the movement was resumed in fierce resistance to the Yushin dictatorship in late 1973. The movement of the early 1970s began with student demonstrations at the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences of Seoul National University in late 1973. Then, dissident leaders organized a movement to petition for a constitutional amendment, and started a campaign to obtain signatures from one million citizens. In response to this, the Park regime fabricated two major cases against dissidents in 1974, which were the National League of Democratic Youth and Students Incident and the second People's Revolutionary Party Incident. In defiance of oppression, however, dissident leaders formed the National Council for Democratic Restoration in November 1974.

The Yushin dictatorship was further tightened in 1975. First of all, the Park regime made a wholesale dismissal of reporters of two major newspapers, *Dong-A Ilbo* and *Chosun Ilbo*, in order to suppress their struggle to protect the freedom of the press. The free press movement was intensified after the government had forced *Dong-A Ilbo* advertisers to cancel their ads at the end of 1974. Moreover, the Park regime executed seven convicts involved in the second People's Revolutionary Party as well as one convict involved in the National League of Democratic Youth and Students on April 9<sup>th</sup>. The regime had fabricated the second People's Revolutionary Party Incident for the purpose of threatening the democratization movement resisting the Yushin dictatorship, and brutally executed the victims within a day from the Supreme Court's affirmation of the original verdicts on the case.<sup>4</sup>

As explained above, the democratization movement of the early 1970s was different from that of the past, since it became an all-out struggle against dictatorship after the emergence of the Yushin system. While the democratization movement had protested individual issues in the past, it now became resistance to the Yushin system itself, namely,

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<sup>4</sup>. Concerning those human rights violations committed by the Park Chung Hee regime, the international association of legal scholars in Geneva called April 8<sup>th</sup>, which was the day when the court made a final ruling on the case of the People's Revolutionary Party, the 'Dark day in Judicial History'.

an antiestablishment movement. It is also noteworthy that many Christian groups joined the democratization movement during the early 1970s. After an Easter service jointly held by all Christian denominations at Namsan Stadium in April 1973, Protestants and Catholics became a pillar of the movement confronting the Park regime on each and every occasion. They were especially active in supporting the movements of workers and peasants who had been discriminated and isolated during rapid industrialization under the Park regime.

In May 1975, the government proclaimed Emergency Decree No. 9 using the communization of Indochina as an excuse. It aimed at fundamentally blocking the democratization movement that remained strong despite repeated oppression and reinforced coercion. Under Emergency Decree No. 9, those who criticized or denied the Yushin Constitution or demanded its amendment would be arrested without warrant and sentenced to imprisonment. Because of its extreme measures, this decree was called the definitive version of emergency decrees proclaimed after the emergence of the Yushin system. Following Emergency Decree No. 9, the four wartime laws were enacted in July, which included the Social Security Act, the National Defense Tax Act, the Civil Defense Act, and the Amendment to the Education Act. The Park regime made a farfetched argument that the wartime laws were unavoidable in order to prepare against the communist threat after the fall of Vietnam, but it is needless to say that the real purpose was to oppress domestic demand for democratization.

After the proclamation of Emergency Decree No. 9, the democratization movement was at a standstill for a considerable period of time because of the extremely powerful impact of the decree. However, the movement was finally resumed in Fall 1977. The opposition formed the Democratic National Coalition in July 1978, which later developed into the National Coalition for Democracy and Reunification in March 1979. In addition, unlike in the past, social movements emerged as part of the democratization movement in the late 1970s. Since the self-immolation of Jeon Tae Il in 1970, social movements had gradually developed with outside support from religious and student activists, and came to the surface in this period, as shown in the workers' struggle at Dong-Il Textile and the peasants' struggle in the Hampyeong Sweet Potato Incident.

As the democratization movement was rejuvenated at the end of the 1970s, enormous uprisings broke out in Busan and also in Masan in October 1979. The Busan and Masan Uprisings were influenced by the sit-in of female YH workers at the New Democratic Party Headquarters that had occurred in August 1979. With regard to the sit-in, the ruling party proposed a bill to deprive New Democratic Party President Kim Young Sam of his membership in the National Assembly. The approval of the bill for Kim's expulsion enraged citizens of Busan and Masan where he was very popular. They launched massive demonstrations, and in turn, their uprisings provoked internal conflicts within the power bloc concerning what measures to take against the uprisings. This internal schism eventually led to the assassination of President Park Chung Hee by one of his closest associates, the KCIA Director, on October 26, 1979. In sum, the direct cause of Park's assassination was internal conflicts within the power bloc, but those conflicts were originally triggered by pressure from the Busan and Masan Uprisings. At last, the assassination of Park Chung Hee put an end to his long dictatorship that had lasted over 18 years since the May 16<sup>th</sup> Coup.

### (3) Democratization Movement under Chun Doo Hwan Regime

The assassination of Park Chung Hee was the result of the inevitable collision between the Park regime's repression and the democratization movement's resistance, which was preceded by years of confrontations and escalated tension between both parties under the Yushin system. After Park's assassination, the prospect of democratization appeared to be clear in South Korea. During the early years of Park's rule, successful economic



development enhanced the legitimacy of his regime. By the time of his death, however, the regime had lost popular support to a considerable extent because economic growth elevated the standard of living, and also because Park reinforced coercion to prolong his rule. After Park's assassination, therefore, expectations for democratization were higher than ever, which was reflected in the 'Spring of Seoul' in 1980.

In order to realize expectations for democratization, it was urgent to determine a schedule for democratic transition in a transparent and speedy manner. It primarily required a constitutional amendment and the subsequent election of a civilian government. Despite public expectations for democratization, however, the plan for democratic transition was obscure during the 'Spring of Seoul,' since remnants of the Yushin system remained in the government and were reluctant to present a concrete plan for democratization. Furthermore, the existence of neo-military forces, which had seized military power through a coup d'état within the army on December 12, 1979, dimmed the prospect of democratization. Under the circumstances the democratization movement quickly spread during April and early May of 1980, with students in the vanguard, protesting the delayed transition to democracy and pressuring for its speedy progress. However, democratization could not be achieved in the 'Spring of Seoul.' Having seized military power through the December 12<sup>th</sup> Coup, neo-military forces took power from the interim government led by the acting President Choi Gyu Ha through a second coup on May 17, 1980.<sup>5</sup> Thus, all efforts for democratic transition were aborted in the end.

Yet, the abortion of democracy was not the end of the situation. Neo-military forces used excessive force in suppressing protestors against the May 17<sup>th</sup> Coup in Gwangju, and enraged citizens launched a massive uprising. Due to their vehement resistance, martial law troops temporarily retreated from Gwangju, and thus, the city was 'liberated' for a while. However, the uprising could not spread further because martial law troops isolated the city from the rest of the country. After all, the Gwangju Popular Uprising was brutally quelled, producing a huge number of casualties.<sup>6</sup> Thus, high hopes for democratization in the 'Spring of Seoul' ended up in the abortion of democracy, while neo-military forces' bloody suppression of Gwangju left deep wounds on the national psyche.

After the Gwangju Popular Uprising, neo-military forces elected their coup leader, General Chun Doo Hwan, President of South Korea under the Yushin Constitution. Simultaneously, they established the Emergency Task Force for National Defense to reorganize the ruling system for their interests. First of all, the Emergency Task Force removed a large number of politicians who were critical of neo-military forces, and began a large-scale 'purge' and 'purification' of government officials, journalists and workers. Then, they set up an army special training unit called Samcheong Education Troops under the pretense of 'eliminating a social evil,' and committed serious violations of human rights through the so-called 'purification education.' Of approximately 40,000 innocent citizens who were forcibly sent to Samcheong Education Troops, 54 victims were killed during the education, and 397 victims suffered death in the aftermath (National Human Rights Commission's Publication Committee on Human Rights White Paper 2004, 79).

Having reorganized the ruling system, neo-military forces amended the Constitution,

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<sup>5</sup>. In this respect, the December 12<sup>th</sup> Coup, which was a revolt in the army, and the May 17<sup>th</sup> Coup constituted a two-fold coup d'état.

<sup>6</sup>. According to the officially confirmed number of casualties in Gwangju Popular Uprising, 154 were killed, 74 were missing, and 3,310 were injured. Including those were arrested or detained, the total number of victims amounts to 5,063 (June Democratic Uprising Memorial Foundation & Korea Democracy Foundation 2007 vol 1, 114).

according to which the President was elected by an electoral college of delegates. This was similar to the indirect election procedure stipulated in the Yushin Constitution. Under the new Constitution, Chun Doo Hwan was reelected President within a year from his first election after the May 17<sup>th</sup> Coup. On the other hand, in order to meet the needs of their new government, neo-military forces also reorganized the political party system as they wished. They formed not only the Democratic Justice Party as the ruling party, but also the Democratic Korea Party and the Korean Nationalist Party as opposition parties. These opposition parties were created under the influence of neo-military forces and in accordance with their intention, and therefore, were literally 'controlled by the government.'

As mentioned above, the Chung Doo Hwan regime of neo-military forces emerged through military coups and repressive measures. Their rule lacked legitimacy from the start, since they seized power through the December 12<sup>th</sup> Coup, the May 17<sup>th</sup> Coup and the bloody suppression of the Gwangju Popular Uprising. As such, they could not rule without coercion and oppression during the earlier years of their rule. At the end of 1983, however, the Chun regime adopted a so-called 'appeasement policy' to decrease oppression to a considerable extent. According to the policy, expelled students were permitted to reenter school, and dismissed professors resumed their positions. Neo-military forces took these measures because they concluded that their rule had been stabilized to some degree. They also needed to make an ostentatious display of domestic peace in order to successfully hold the 1986 Seoul Asian Games as well as the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, both of which had been promoted to cover up their lack of legitimacy.

Paradoxically, however, the appeasement policy gave an impetus to the explosive growth of the democratization movement in every sector of society. First of all, students started a campaign to promote democratization or self-regulation on campus, which developed into a direct struggle against Chun Doo Hwan's dictatorial regime. Then, Beginning with the labor movement, the movements of the urban poor and the peasantry also spread swiftly as they fought for the right to live. With regard to the labor movement, it should be noted that student-labor solidarity was gradually consolidated. And as part of the struggle for student-labor solidarity, thousands of college students left school to engage in factory work as disguised workers in order to participate in the labor movement themselves or to support workers(Gu Hae Geun 2002, 158-165).<sup>7</sup> The dissident movement was also activated again. In 1984, dissident leaders formed the Council for the People's Democratic Movement in June and the National Council for Democratic Reunification in October. Moreover, politicians who were removed from the political arena by the Chun regime formed the Council for the Promotion of Democracy in May 1984.

In sum, during the year of 1984, the democratization movement grew explosively in every sector of South Korean society under the appeasement policy. Such explosive growth of the movement led to a series of important events in 1985, which symbolized the democratization movement of the 1980s. First of all, the New Korean Democratic Party, which had been newly established based on the Council for the Promotion of Democracy, defeated the Democratic Korea Party in the February 12<sup>th</sup> general election, and emerged as the first opposition party. In May, a group of student activists occupied the U. S. Cultural Center in Seoul, and staged a sit-in protesting the United States' tacit support for neo-military forces in quelling the Gwangju Popular Uprising.<sup>8</sup> With respect to the labor movement, union workers at Daewoo Motor factories went on strike in April, and labor

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<sup>7</sup> Gu Hae Geun estimates the number of students who engaged in factory work as disguised worker at 3,000 or more, quoting the state George Ogle.

<sup>8</sup>. Later, this gave rise to the anti-American movement in South Korea.

unions in the Guro District of Seoul jointly embarked on strikes in the 'Guro Unified Struggle' in June. These cases revealed some new aspects of the labor movement. Unlike in the past, male blue collar workers working at factories of large corporations went on strike, and workers went on sympathy strikes beyond the boundary of individual workplace(Gu Hae Geun 2002, 165-174). In September, the Council for the People's Democratic Movement and the National Council for Democratic Reunification were united to build the Coalition for Democratic Reunification and the People's Movement, which would be the leading organization of the democratization movement in general.

Then, what were the reasons for the explosive growth of the democratization movement under the appeasement policy? Most of all, the primary reason was the 'shock' of the savage suppression by neo-military forces in Gwangju. The army, whose duty was to protect the lives of the people, dispatched elite airborne troops to massacre countless citizens of Gwangju, and such experience deeply shocked democratization movement forces. They were enraged by neo-military forces' atrocities in Gwangju, and also suffered from survivor guilt for those victims who had been sacrificed on behalf of themselves. Due to these factors, the democratization movement erupted in the changed political situation under the appeasement policy. In this respect, the 1980s democratization movement was an extension of the 1970s movement, but simultaneously differed from it in terms of intensity and explosiveness which resulted from anger and self-blame induced by the experience of Gwangju.

Under the circumstances, the democratization movement, spearheaded by the student movement, became 'radicalized' and 'scientific.' The movement's 'radicalization' means that resistance to Chun Doo Hwan's dictatorship became far more strong and intensive than ever, and the movement's 'scientification' means that theories, political lines, strategies and tactics began to be considered very important. As a result, there were incessant debates over various theories and tactics within activist circles, and more radical groups emerged as part of the democratization movement in the 1980s.

Another important point is that the 1980s democratization movement was no longer limited to the student movement and the dissident movement. Instead, it was aligned with social movements, and particularly with the labor movement. Moreover, the opposition party, which had been excluded from the political scene, reentered the political arena through the February 12<sup>th</sup> general election in 1985 and expressed opposition to dictatorship and support for democratization more clearly. Accordingly, the democratization movement came to comprise social movements and the opposition party as well as the student movement and the dissident movement, which made it possible for them to form the 'largest democratic coalition'(Choi Jang Jip 1989, 293-96).

By mid-1985, therefore, democratization movement forces were able to confront the Chun Doo Hwan regime almost equally. In this situation, they proposed a constitutional amendment for direct election of the President, which was the minimum platform, as the immediate goal of the democratization movement. Owing to this proposal, the democratization movement started to gain wide support from the masses. In Spring 1986, the New Korean Democratic Party led a petition campaign to obtain ten million signatures demanding a constitutional amendment for direct election of the President, and held mass rallies across the country to form regional branches of the campaign for constitutional change. The rallies were held in major cities and received enthusiastic response everywhere. Particularly in Gwangju, the rally involved 300,000 citizens.

Afterwards, the issue of constitutional amendment was on the top political agenda. There were sharp conflicts and confrontations between democratization movement forces demanding direct election of the President and the Chun regime trying to block their efforts. In response to the rapidly spreading movement to amend the Constitution, the Chun regime attempted to persuade the opposition party to participate in negotiations on constitutional amendment in the National Assembly. Simultaneously, the regime strongly

repressed dissidents who became separated from the opposition party due to parliamentary negotiations. As a result, many activists were arrested for a series of 'public security incidents' in 1986, and various movement organizations suffered from repression, including the Coalition for Democratic Reunification and the People's Movement. Furthermore, the regime created a McCarthyist atmosphere in South Korea. In October, the government announced that the country was under threat from the North which might discharge water from Geumgangsán Dam, and there was also a rumor about the death of Kim Il Sung in November 1986. Lastly, when students held a joint rally at Konkuk University in Seoul, the regime condemned it as a 'riot committed by communist revolutionaries,' and embarked on a large-scale repressive operation to arrest about 1,300 students.

However, extreme repression against the democratization movement resulted in serious violations of human rights, such as the torture of a dissident leader named Kim Geun Tae and the sexual torture committed at the Bucheon Police Station. At last, the habitual use of torture under the Chun regime led to the torture death of Park Jong Cheol, who was a student at Seoul National University, in January 1987. On the other hand, parliamentary negotiations on constitutional amendment did not progress well, either, since it was difficult to narrow the distance between the ruling party's demand to introduce a parliamentary cabinet system and the opposition party's demand to adopt a direct presidential election system. Consequently, President Chun made an announcement on April 13<sup>th</sup> that all discussions about constitutional amendment would be prohibited, and that the next presidential election would be held pursuant to the procedures stipulated in the current Constitution. In sum, all expectations for realizing democratization through a voluntary concession of the Chun regime were crushed by serious violations of human rights, as shown in the torture death of Park Jong Cheol, and also by the aborted effort to amend the Constitution to adopt a direct presidential election system. Now, citizens had no choice but to resort to street protests in order to bring about democratization by themselves.

### **3. Democratization of Authoritarian Regime & Change in Democratization Movement**

As described above, the democratization movement in the 1980s had rapidly grown since the appeasement policy, and the 'largest democratic coalition' was formed prior to the June Democratic Uprising in 1987. There were signs showing that, given a momentum for change, it could turn into a massive popular uprising for democratization. And it actually turned into a massive popular uprising in 1987, which was the June Democratic Uprising. Then, how did the June Democratic Uprising break out and progress? How did the subsequent transition to democracy unfold? And how did the democratization movement change after democratization?

#### (1) June Democratic Uprising of 1987 & Transition to Democracy

There were emerging signs of massive popular uprising after the torture death of Park Jong Cheol in early 1987. On February 7<sup>th</sup>, the 'National Memorial Ceremony for the Late Park Jong Cheol' was held nationwide, where approximately 60,000 citizens participated in 16 regions across the country despite the police blockade. Citizens' participation continued in the 'Great March of the People for Democratization and Banning Torture' held on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the police arrested 439 citizens on that day. In this situation, the Chun Doo Hwan regime announced a policy to preserve the existing Constitution on April 13<sup>th</sup>, which further increased citizens' antipathy and resentment toward the regime's repressive policies. Immediately after the announcement, people from all sectors of society made numerous statements against the policy to preserve the existing Constitution. On May 18<sup>th</sup>, Father Kim Seung Hun of the Catholic Priests' Association for Justice disclosed

to the public that the authorities had attempted to cover up the truth about the torture death of Park Jong Cheol, and his disclosure created a critical momentum for the June Democratic Uprising.

From then on, the situation developed in an irreversible direction. The newly formed National Movement Headquarters to Win a Democratic Constitution decided to hold a massive national rally on June 10<sup>th</sup> in order to protest the torture death committed by the Chun regime and also to demand an amendment for a democratic constitution. It turned out to be the beginning of the June Democratic Uprising, which was a great national uprising that forced the regime to accept demand for democratization. During the uprising that lasted for 20 days until June 29<sup>th</sup>, millions of citizens poured out into the street all over the country despite police repression, shouting “Abolish the Evil Constitution!” and “Down with Dictatorship!”

The June Democratic Uprising went through three stages as follows; during the first phase(June 10<sup>th</sup>~18<sup>th</sup>), the national rally held on June 10<sup>th</sup> involved about 240,000 protestors in 22 regions across the country, showing the potential for successful uprising. Particularly in Seoul, the June 10<sup>th</sup> rally led to a sit-in at Myeongdong Cathedral, which would last until June 15<sup>th</sup> and prove an incentive to the expansion of the uprising. Then, during the second phase(June 18<sup>th</sup>~26<sup>th</sup>), mass rallies to ban tear gas were held in 16 regions across the country on June 18<sup>th</sup>. More than 500,000 citizens participated in the rallies, and the Busan rally involved 300,000~400,000 citizens. The June 18<sup>th</sup> rallies practically overwhelmed the police. Lastly, during the third phase(June 26<sup>th</sup>~29<sup>th</sup>), 1.4 million citizens participated in the ‘Great Peaceful March of the People’ held in 34 cities and 4 counties on June 26<sup>th</sup>. It was the final blow to Chun Doo Hwan’s dictatorial regime which was at a dead end.

After the great national uprising had swept the country for 20 days, the Chun regime finally announced a plan to resolve the situation, which was called the June 29<sup>th</sup> Declaration. It consisted of eight items, including a constitutional amendment for direct election of the President. At last, it opened the way to democratic transition that would democratize the authoritarian regime in South Korea.

Then, what were the reasons that contributed to the success of the June Democratic Uprising? First of all, the formation of the ‘largest democratic coalition’, which emerged when the democratization movement centered around the student movement and the dissident movement came to comprise social movements and the opposition party, was a key to its success. Upon this basis, they proposed a constitutional amendment for direct election of the President, which was the minimum platform, as the immediate goal of the movement. Owing to this proposal, the democratization movement started to gain wide support and participation of citizens from all over the country. Another important point is that, unlike in the Gwangju Popular Uprising, the Chun regime could not mobilize the military against a national popular uprising, since the regime did not have enough confidence to successfully quell it by military force. In addition, the United States had tacitly approved neo-military forces to mobilize the military against civilians in Gwangju, but pressured the Chun regime not to use military force this time.

On the other hand, the June Democratic Uprising led to another form of uprising after the June 29<sup>th</sup> Declaration. In an politically open atmosphere by the June 29<sup>th</sup> Declaration, workers stirred up South Korea by resolutely fighting for their long neglected rights. Over some three months from early July to September, strikes broke out one after another in almost every region from Ulsan to the Metropolitan area, wherever the working class population was concentrated. Workers demanded their basic rights that had not been guaranteed under the authoritarian regimes, such as wage increase, the improvement of working conditions, the right to union representation and the right to collective agreements. the Great Struggle of Workers, which was another uprising following the

June Democratic Uprising, involved 3,255 strikes and approximately 1.22 million participants(Kim Geum Su 2004, 86).

While workers continued their struggle, politicians were steering the process of democratic transition according to the June 29<sup>th</sup> Declaration. First of all, political parties assumed the task of amending the Constitution. The ruling Democratic Justice Party and the Reunification Democratic Party had a 'political talk of eight leaders,' and drafted a constitutional amendment based on direct election of the President with a single five-year term of office. The bill was passed by the National Assembly, and then, was put to a referendum. The new Constitution was promulgated on October 29<sup>th</sup>, and presidential election campaigns began. Since the President was to be elected directly by the people, democratization movement forces were expected to win for certain. However, they became divided by the fact that the two leading candidates of the opposition, Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung, would not cooperate in the selection of a single opposition presidential candidate. Moreover, all presidential candidates resorted to full-scale regionalism in their campaigns, and thus, voters in support of democratization were also divided according to the region of their origin. In the end, democratization movement forces lost the presidential election held in December 16<sup>th</sup>, which was the founding election for the first President after democratization. According to the election results, Candidate Roh Tae Woo of the Democratic Justice Party won 36.6%, Candidate Kim Young Sam of the Reunification Democratic Party won 28.1%, and Candidate Kim Dae Jung of the Party for Peace and Democracy won 27.0%.

In conclusion, the democratization movement successfully brought about a democratic transition in South Korea through the June Democratic Uprising, but failed to take the initiative in establishing a democratic government. Rather, it provided an opportunity for remnants of the past dictatorial regime to come back to power legitimately. For that reason, the democratic transition was made without rooting out dictatorial legacies. Yet, there is no doubt that it was a transition to democracy through legitimate procedures.

## (2) Change in Democratization Movement after Democratization

As explained above, the democratization movement finally made it possible to democratize the authoritarian regime through the June Democratic Uprising. With regard to this, there were some peculiarities in the South Korean democratization movement which contributed to the success of the June Democratic Uprising.

First of all, in terms of organizational form, the South Korean democratization movement was a broadly based coalitional movement led by multiple groups, rather than by a single class or social group. This coalitional movement could maintain its unity relatively well by sharing democratic values and a passion for democratization. In addition, This coalitional movement could comprise religious movement and social movements as well as the student movement and the dissident movement, and it formed an alliance with the opposition party after the February 12<sup>th</sup> general election. Consequently, the democratization movement could form the largest democratic coalition immediately prior to the June Democratic Uprising.

Then, in terms of the mode of development, the South Korean democratization movement was ordinarily led by activist groups, but developed into a massive popular uprising for democratization when a certain momentum for change was created. The April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution in 1960, the Gwangju Popular Uprising in 1980, and the June Democratic Uprising in 1987 were exemplary cases of this character. These democratic uprisings either threatened or overthrew the dictatorial regimes. The April 19<sup>th</sup> Revolution and the Gwangju Popular Uprising were, of course, reversed or repressed by military forces. In 1987, however, such reversal of direction was impossible in the June Democratic Uprising that involved several million citizens across the country. Due to this uprising,

the Chun Doo Hwan regime had to accept democratization and direct election of the President.

Considering the aforementioned peculiarities in the South Korean democratization movement, the democratic transition of 1987 is more like a 'transition by movement' rather than a 'transition by pact' that has been frequently emphasized in the theory of democratic transition (O'Donnell et al. 1986). In South Korea, it was pressure from a massive national uprising, rather than compromise between the moderates both of the regime and of the movement, that played a more decisive role in forcing the dictatorial regime to accept democratization (Jung Hae Gu, Kim Hye Jin & Jeong Sang Ho 2004, 14-19).

Although the democratic transition ended up in the emergence of the Roh Tae Woo regime which was the successor regime to Chun Doo Hwan, the environment of South Korean democracy did change after the transition. Above all, the constitutional system began to operate normally under the amended Constitution in 1987, and subsequently, the arbitrary exercise of the state's power was reduced to a remarkable extent. In addition, political society and civil society, which had been repressed by authoritarian rule under the dictatorial regimes, were also normalized due to democratization. In political society, a normal political party system based on popular support was built, although it was under the influence of regionalism. Civil society also regained autonomy and developed rapidly afterwards.

In this situation, the Roh Tae Woo government, which had emerged after the democratic transition, was faced with dual tasks. On the one hand, the regime needed to maintain its privileges and interests as the successor regime to Chun Doo Hwan. On the other hand, however, it inevitably had to accept the demand for democratic reform due to democratization. Moreover, the National Assembly was dominated by several opposition parties after the 1988 general election, and they pressured the government for democratic reform. Because of these factors, some limited efforts were made to promote democratic reform during the early years of the Roh government, such as the establishment of the 'Special Committee for the Investigation of May 18<sup>th</sup> Gwangju Democratic Movement' as well as the 'Special Committee for the Investigation of Irregularities, Abuse of Power and Graft in the Fifth Republic.' Without genuine efforts by the government, however, democratic reform was not strongly promoted, and subsequently did not produce meaningful results.

Furthermore, those efforts for democratic reform were reversed in the latter half of Roh's term. The ruling Democratic Justice Party induced two opposition parties, the Reunification Democratic Party and the New Democratic Republican Party, to form a new political party, and the three of them co-founded the Democratic Liberal Party in January 1990. Consequently, the opposition-dominated parliament turned into the ruling party-dominated parliament overnight, and pressure for democratic reform disappeared from the National Assembly. The consolidation of the three parties also isolated regionally the Jeolla-do Province which was under Kim Dae Jung's influence. This provided an opportunity for Kim Young Sam, who was leading the Reunification Democratic Party at the time of the consolidation, to win the 1992 presidential election. In other words, after democratization, the conservative forces behind the Roh Tae Woo regime could return to power once more by winning over a prominent politician from a former democratic opposition party to their side. The result was the emergence of the Kim Young Sam government.

Then, how did the democratization movement change in a different political environment after democratic transition? First, democratization movement forces intended to strengthen the movement in the same way as in the past in the political opening situation after democratization. In order to do so, they decided to build a new national organization joined by almost all regional and sectoral groups in the democratization

movement, and formed the Nationalist Democratic Movement Association in January 1989, which later developed into the National Association for Democracy and Reunification in December 1991. Quite unexpectedly, however, this huge coalitional organization of the democratization movement did not perform its role properly, and was weakened as time went by.

What were the reasons that weakened the democratization movement in the form of a large coalitional organization after democratization? One of the reasons was internal conflict, but the more important reason was a structural one. The Roh Tae Woo government was legitimately elected although it was the successor regime to Chun Doo Hwan's dictatorial regime, and the political party system was normalized and functioning. Under the circumstances, the democratization movement in the form of a large coalitional organization was not persuasive to the public any more. In May 1991, the democratization movement launched a full-scale struggle in vehement protest against the death of a student named Gang Gyeong Dae who had been beaten to death by the police, but failed to gain sympathy and support from the public at large.

Contrary to the democratization movement in the form of a large coalitional organization, social movements were burgeoning in the autonomous and expanding civil society. They formed the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice in July 1989, the Korean Federation for Environmental Movement in 1993, and the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy in 1994. The civic movement gradually emerged as a new major movement, and rapidly spread to almost all sectors of society (Kim Ho Ki, 2007, 95-104). According to *The 2006 Comprehensive Survey of South Korean Non-Government Organizations*, the number of NGOs after democratization skyrocketed from 1,235 in 1999 to 3,937 in 2002, and further up to 5,556 in 2005.

Secondly, the labor movement also grew rapidly after democratization under the influence of the June Democratic Uprising and the Great Struggle of Workers that had lasted from July to September of 1986. As a result, the unionization rate reached the peak of 18.6% after democratization, and the number of union members amounted to 1.93 million at the end of 1989 (Kim Geum Su 2004, 145-146). Even after democratization, however, the labor movement was not free from the state's repression, and became the target of attack by the Roh regime in what the government called a "national security situation" in 1989. Still, the democratic union movement continued in defiance of repression, and led to the formation of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions with more than 420,000 union members in November 1995 (Kim Geum Su 2004, 162-168). Afterwards, the burgeoning progressive Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and the existing, more moderate Federation of Korean Trade Unions became the two umbrella organizations of the democratic union movement in South Korea.

Lastly, the democratization movement also developed into a reunification movement after democratization. Prior to democratization, the Gwangju Popular Uprising motivated students to lead an anti-American movement as part of the democratization movement, which developed into the nationalist movement of the National Liberation (NL) line. After democratization, the nationalist movement developed into an active movement for reunification, while the Roh government pursued the North Policy in the post-Cold War international environment. Activists of the reunification movement made a proposal that both Koreas jointly host the 1988 Olympic Games. In 1989, there were a series of surprising visits to North Korea; Reverend Mun Ik Hwan visited Pyongyang, Im Su Gyeong participated in the Pyongyang Festival as a delegate from the National Council of College Student Representatives, and Assemblyman Seo Gyeong Won of the Party for Peace and Democracy also visited the North. These incidents caused the Roh government to take repressive measures to cope with the so-called "national security situation," but simultaneously heralded the expansion of the reunification movement and its development into the peace movement.



#### 4. Conclusion

After ten years from the democratic transition in 1987, Kim Dae Jung was elected President of South Korea in the 15<sup>th</sup> presidential election held in December 1997. The emergence of the Kim Dae Jung government was a very meaningful event because it was the first regime change by election, and also because the regime change was made by a democratic opposition party. In the 1987 presidential election held during the process of democratic transition, Roh Tae Woo, who had been nominated by the Chun Doo Hwan regime, could win because candidates from democratic opposition parties were divided. In this sense, the democratic transition of 1987 was only a formal one, and the substantial transition to democracy came after a decade with the victory of the democratic opposition party in the 1997 presidential election.

During the following decade, the Kim Dae Jung government and its successor government led by President Roh Moo Hyun fulfilled a number of tasks of democratic reform. First of all, the Kim Dae Jung government actively promoted the 'Sunshine Policy' in the post-Cold War atmosphere. It improved inter-Korean relations, and also removed some detrimental aspects caused by anticommunism in South Korean society to a considerable extent. In addition, the Kim Dae Jung government achieved remarkable progress in human rights improvement, as exemplified in the foundation of the National Human Rights Commission. The Roh Moo Hyun government was also active in carrying out various tasks of democratic reform against corruption and authoritarianism. In this respect, democracy made considerable progress in South Korea during the two decades following democratization, at least in terms of procedural and political democracy.

Despite the progress of procedural and political democracy, however, South Korean democracy is now faced with another challenge different from that of the past. From a socio-economic perspective, South Korean society is confronted with serious regional disparities and social conflicts. In particular, the country has been rapidly polarized since the financial crisis in 1997 because it unconditionally adopted neo-liberal globalization policies. Such disparities and conflicts are further aggravated by the fact that South Korea does not have a solid social welfare system, unlike Western societies. Currently, these problems constitute a threat to South Korean democracy.

After all, democracy in South Korea has rapidly developed in a short period of time, and in particular, democratization movement forces have made the greatest contribution to the development of democracy by their devoted efforts. The great contribution was made not only by prominent leaders, but also by countless victims and ordinary people. Many 'democratic patriots' had to sacrifice their lives for the cause of democratization, and numerous anonymous people shed blood, sweat and tears to join the democratization movement in one way or another. In this respect, discussions on the development of South Korean democracy cannot be done without referring to their efforts and self-sacrifice devoted to the democratization movement.

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