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Concluding Remarks

It has been shown that democracy and the democratization movement in Korea have evolved via a complex series of twists and turns in the course of state building and consolidation of the national division. The establishment of 'democratic' governments, starting with that of Kim Young-sam's Civilian Government and continuing through Kim Dae-jung's Government, signified the end of one epoch and the commencement of a new one. In particular, it is a testimony to the intensity of the Korean people's desire for democratic reform that the 2002 presidential election put in place Roh Moo-hyun's Participative Government, and gave one million votes to a progressive party. As the nation passes over the threshold into the new century it is apposite to evaluate some salient features of the process of democratization thus far.

The modern history of Korea is characterized by a dynamism of unprecedented magnitude. The main undercurrent has been the democratization movement. As a movement from below that made actual changes, it has left a mark on world history by dint of the fact that integral to the process of democratization four dictatorial presidents, Rhee Syng-man, Park Chung-hee, Chun Doo-hwan, and Roh Tae-woo were either deposed or imprisoned. As such, the democratization movement was the main engine for political transformation, social progress, and a deepening and widening of the democratic ethic in Korea. The movement has a track record of resilience and militancy in its confrontation of dictators, and Table 1 below illustrates that record by showing the numbers of persons arrested, detained, and indicted for alleged contraventions of national security laws.

Table1. Arrests, detentions, and indictments

	National Security Act			Anti-Communism Act			Act Concerning Assembly and Demonstration		
	arrested	detained	indicted	arrested	detained	indicted	arrested	detained	indicted
1965	153	91(141)	115(139)	150	87(200)	89(186)	712	113(520)	148(516)
1966	139	83(116)	32(56)	203	103(211)	107(187)	47	36(245)	26(229)
1967	168	47(102)	61(105)	106	93(150)	94(137)	591	13(388)	90(389)
1968	231	126(235)	151(233)	548	221(429)	393(423)	97	10(203)	113(203)
1969	80	38(53)	52(53)	409	299(484)	396(477)	98	5(124)	76(125)
1970	38	47(71)	61(71)	289	226(348)	276(318)	55	5(109)	59(106)
1971	97	48(81)	64(80)	232	144(265)	193(256)	210	20(164)	91(161)
1972	278	133(308)	209(308)	437	250(425)	328(422)	96	1(74)	29(72)
1973	76	68(100)	71(98)	445	226(369)	315(369)	85	10(30)	15(30)
1974	86	32(47)	21(43)	269	200(240)	189(207)	19	3(19)	12(19)
1975	22	13(25)	20(25)	349	291(350)	315(350)	82	41(82)	46(82)
1976	29	18(44)	32(44)	319	259(315)	270(315)	32	0(7)	0(7)
1977	.	.	.	.	.	.	0	0(10)	143(166)
1978	.	.	.	.	.	.	12	10(20)	18(21)
1979	.	.	.	.	.	.	26	28(63)	49(64)
1980	.	.	.	The Anti-Communism Act was abolished on December 31, 1980.			340	2(23)	11(23)
1981	.	.	.				311	132(240)	180(240)
1982	.	.	.				197	117(193)	144(193)
1983	.	.	.				388	270(368)	313(368)
1984	.	.	.				156	18(311)	135(310)
1985	143	100(160)	119(156)				840	318(570)	361(569)
1986	523	336(421)	339(420)				2,574	1,594(2,480)	1,241(2,480)
1987	786	420(587)	431(583)				4,172	707(1,464)	522(1,462)
1988	221	101(210)	111(209)				1,509	348(790)	346(789)
1989	886	253(494)	320(485)				1,185	204(882)	411(881)
1990	1,223	361(654)	426(638)	2,818	496(1,861)	691(1,851)			
1991	1,005	354(628)	358(601)	1,497	356(1,607)	599(1,591)			
1992	609	280(421)	304(414)	799	92(613)	158(608)			
1993	375	93(207)	114(202)	460	24(277)	66(277)			
1994	714	291(401)	320(401)	763	59(356)	126(351)			
1995	715	224(305)	232(305)	442	44(373)	115(373)			
1996	733	185(261)	225(261)	9,383	353(2,128)	508(2,128)			
1997	901	62(101)	86(101)	2,309	283(2,274)	635(2,274)			

- * Numbers in parenthesis are of persons found liable for legal action. Numbers in each column are independent statistics, having no connection with those in any other column.
- * Statistics for 1977~1984 do not exist. For 1977~1979 this is due to the application of Emergency Presidential Decrees, and for 1980 it is due to the imposition of Martial Law. The reason for the absence of 1981~1984 statistical records is not known.

Another feature of the democratization movement is the relative non-violence of its methods and tactics. It is true that incendiary devices and iron pipes were used in many demonstrations, and an armed resistance was staged in Gwangju in May 1980, but these represent exceptional cases of resistance against much superior, and extremely violent, government forces. Where violence was resorted to by protestors and demonstrators it was almost exclusively in self-defence against indiscriminate and ruthless attacks by agents of the state. It was not methods of terrorism but methods of self-sacrifice, such as burning themselves to death, self-disembowelment, and suicidal jumps from buildings, that were chosen by the many who lost their lives in the course of the pro-democracy struggles.

Conditioned by the physical and geographical division of the nation and the rampant anti-communism in Korean society, there was a tendency on the part of pro-democracy activists to adopt self-sacrificial methods whenever the manifestations of state power became excessive or when the movement failed to attract sufficient popular support on certain issues. This can be related to Korean social norms that emphasize communitarian and moral standards rather than individualistic and rational judgement. It therefore has a close connection with the tradition of avoiding the use of aggression towards authority. In other words, those who wish to resist tend to choose causing alarm in both the wider community and to the specific 'target' in the conflict by the use of extremely self-decremental means like suicide, rather than exerting direct force against the target.

The main actors in the democratization movement have also changed both over time and in the preferred category of

democracy. Two features deserve attention here. First is the leadership of the student movement. The student movement did not occupy a central part of the 'liberation space' which opened up in 1987, and since that time it has gradually lost influence in the transition to democracy. However, its role as a leading force in the overall democratization process cannot be questioned. An indirect testimony to the magnitude of the resistance mounted by the student movement can be seen in the number of students detained during the incumbency of each dictatorial regime.

Table 2. University student detainments

year		detained	year		detained
1970		2	1988		546
1971		43	1989		1,232
1972		1	1990	Roh Tae-woo	1,173
1973		165	1991	Government	765
1974	Park Chung-hee	246	1992		255
1975	Regime	126	1993		82
1976		27	1994		410
1977		90	1995		263
1978		230	1996	Kim Young-sam	909
1979		267	1997	and	1,014
1980		468	1998	Kim Dae-jung	419
1981		258	1999	governments	288
1982		200	2000		129
1983	Chun Doo-hwan	316	2001		149
1984	Regime	61			
1985		678			
1986		2,117			
1987		1,189			

* Numbers include persons detained on charges of violating the Act Concerning Punishment for Use of Inflammable Bottles, Etc.; the Act Concerning Punishment for Special Obstruction, Damage, Violent Act, Etc. to Law Enforcement; the National Security Act; the Act Concerning Assembly and Demonstration; the Road and Traffic Act, etc.

The second feature deserving of attention is the absence of participation by the Korean bourgeoisie and the fragility of the liberal forces in the democratization movement. In the history of modern revolutions and political democratization in the West, the role of the bourgeoisie was crucial, and is given expression in the dictum ‘No democracy without the bourgeoisie’. In Korea, however, the bourgeois class stood in denial of the imperative for democracy, and instead allied with the military regimes. Moreover, the liberal forces in the political democratization movement were, in fact, conservative forces by nature within the ‘political society,’ and markedly different from the kind of liberal forces acting in the civil society. The leading players in the pro–democracy movement in Korea did not constitute liberal forces, but were progressive forces. It was only in the 1990s that liberal forces began to play an important role in democratization, together with the growth of the civil movement.



A meeting cherishing the memory of two middle school girl students killed by a US army armored car. (2003)



A candlelit protest site crying against dispatching the combat troops to Iraq.(2004)

Lastly, one further question deserves a place here: namely, what is the current status of democracy in Korea after such a dynamic recent history? It is true that issues of political democracy have been largely resolved in the course of democratic transition since 1987. However, there have also been serious set-backs in the quality of life of ordinary Korean people because of the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots, a phenomenon apparent since the adoption of American-style neo-liberal policies and the imposition of IMF prescriptions from 1998. Regimented industrial relations that dominated the economy have ignored totally the producer economy. The agenda of democracy in international relations disappeared as soon as the election was over and the new government put in place, even under the liberal orientation of President Roh Moo-hyun. In the wake of 'armed globalization' pursued by the militarist unilateralism of the United States and the 'criminalization of social resistance' in the name of a war against terror, it became even more difficult for democratic forces to promote issues of democracy in foreign relations or to thaw the frozen relationship with North Korea. Issues of the life-world democracy are rapidly gaining ground despite the

predominance of the mega-discourses of anti-dictatorship and democratic transformation of the state in the foregoing period, but actual progress remains minimal.

In conclusion, one key to enhancing democracy in Korea may be found by asking the question why the democratization process has so far only resulted in a passive revolution from the top to a conservative democratic polity, despite the enormous energy emanating from below? Another key may lie in linking this reflection to a new popular power and wider solidarity for the 'democratization of democracy' in the new circumstances presented by the 21st century. There is now an urgent need to converge all the diverse energies in a drive for the democratic reform of Korean society through horizontal solidarity between civil and popular movements, and between social and political movements. Also called for is the creation of collective responses and practical alternatives through democratic and communicative solidarity with other communities across national boundaries in order to counter the trend of 'armed globalization'.
(written by Cho Hyun-yun, 2004)