Development of Political Education in Korea

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I. Introduction

Since Korea achieved independence from Japanese colonization in 1945, Koreans have had a steadfast and strong aspiration to actualize democracy in Korea. However, this aspiration of Koreans toward democracy cannot be fulfilled owing to the previous authoritarian governments in Korea. This unfulfilled aspiration engendered continuous conflicts between the Korean people and their governments until the 1980s. These conflicts have been the major source of historical and political turbulance as well as the thrust for political development in Korea. Thanks to the firm aspiration for democracy of the Korean people, Korean society, in spite of its serious socio-political problems and difficulties, continues to progress.

The fact that Koreans have a strong aspiration for democracy indicates that Koreans are equipped with one of basic attitudes in attaining democracy. However, democratic aspiration is not sufficiently enough for one nation to be a democratic country: Koreans should be equipped with some knowledge concerning national political systems and management, should participate more actively in making decisions and policies of our nation and communities, and should be more vigorous, not only in demanding our rights but also, in fulfilling our responsibilities. Citizens, by putting more emphasis on group processes than on personal egos in their group and social life, should develop the habit of willingly following the rules of the group processes. These central democratic attitudes are not provided or given naturally to us but can be attained through educational disciplines and learning. In this sense, democratic citizenship education is significant.

In this paper, how the purposes and contents of Korean

democratic citizenship education has been evolved, and what impacts and effects this education has made in Korean society will be examined.

II. The Meaning of Citizenship Education

Democratic citizenship education has been considered one of the most important and urgent tasks among the countries that attained independence after World War II, because it is the most crucial requirement in stabilizing a democratic political system. However, it is a mistake to consider that this democratic citizen education is a crucial task only to the Third World Countries. The continuation of this type of education is one of the most essential tasks for advanced countries. In order for a nation to maintain a democratic society, people should be always interested in participating in national and commuinity affairs and in recognizing people's rights as well as accepting civic responsibilities. That is why, even in advanced countries, most of which have secured a democratic political system already, people and governments continuously endeavor to make the best of citizenship education. Therefore, citizenship education is an important task not just for politically underdeveloped countries but equally an important one for politically developed countries. Moreover, in our present world of globalization, enhancing citizen education is one of the most important common interests and tasks to both the advanced and the third world countries.

Democratic citizenship education is indispensable not only to children and adolescents but to all citizens. Education for adults, is utmost importantance. The reasons for this are: first, adults who are political actors currently, determine our present political matters; and, second, adults' political activities which lead to the formation of a political culture, have tangible impacts on the growing youth. Therefore all age groups should be involved in citizenship education. But in terms of taking charge of democratic citizenship education, adult education should be most emphasized.

Democratic citizenship education can be connected to "political education" or "citizenship education." However, the concepts of these terms are differently defined and understood

according to different contexts and purposes. Since these different understandings might generate confusion, it is necessary to clarify and define the terms and concepts first. "Political education" means to provide opportunities to people who are the agents of the nation for learning and attaining some clear and accurate understanding and knowledge of political matters, and to assist people to participate in all the political processes essential for the preservation and development of a democratic community. Furthermore, this helps people to be responsible political agents who bear active rights and responsibilities.

In reality, however, some falsely insist that the most democratic education is the political education which implements an ideologically oriented-political indoctrination and imposes political consciousness on people for the sake of rationalizing the protection of a certain political regime. As we can see, realistically, the issue of which is the true "political education" can be differently explained and defined according to different perspectives and points of view.

A variety of characteristics of "political education" or "citizenship education" can be found in the practices of countries (Thomas, 1989). If we categorize the varieties of "political education," the first one is "nationalistic political education," which puts emphasis on national consciousness and cultural identity. The second one is "people mobilization oriented political education." This, which is often found in the developing countries, aims toward the achievement of economic growth and unity of politics. The third one is "democracy oriented political education," which attempts to transform authority oriented-people's consciousness and political culture to democracy oriented-culture and participatory consciousness. In general, the first two are characterized as "authority oriented political education" and the final one as "liberal oriented political education."

Since the concepts of political education, as discussed above, are diverse, and even though a true political education can be distinguished from a false one, in an attempt to clarify the concepts of political education intellectually, it is appropriate in critical discussion to include all those different concepts. It is considered that democratic citizenship education is equal to true

political education, that is, to "democracy oriented political education." In Korean context, however, it is argued that this kind of political education cannot totally exclude the "nationalistic" and "people mobilization" elements of political education.

Since, as remarked before, confusion concerning terms and concepts of political education is still possible, they will be further discussed in this paper. The debate concerning political education in Britain is a good example. Political education in British schools was started in the 1970s (Crick, 1990). Prior to this time, political education in Britain, had not been systematic but poorly organized and unstructured. During this time, British history teachers had taught political education under the subjects of "politics," "current issues," "civics," and "the Constitution." These subjects, compared to other subjects, were lowely respected and poorly treated in assigning class time. In addition, the teachers who were in charge of these subjects, compared to other teachers, tended to be less respected. In 1969, these teachers organized their own association to enhance the professional level of these subjects and to strengthen their professional positions. At first, it was suggested that the association be referred to as the "Association for Civic Education" but it couldn't be resolved even with a long strenuous debate. It was because the term of civic education was perceived to portray "good citizens" who obey the laws well rather than to represent an "active and critical citizen." The secondly name of "Association for Political Studies" was not picked because it exposed too much academic color. The term of "Association for Political Education" was almost selected but was not chosen because this term was similar to the one that the young communists used for advocating their ideology. The name of "Politics Association" was chosen, not because it was supported by the members, but because it had few opponents.

Political education in Korea has been referred to by numerous names. It has often been referred to as "democratic citizenship education," "education for national identity," "civic education," and "social studies." Additionally, it has been referred to as educational activities for social awareness out of school. For example, some education activities are planned by the Government to educate people and others are developed by

critical civic organizations to foster critical perspectives relating to reality. Even though this paper focuses on elucidating the characteristics of how education has been implemented in generating democratic citizenship in Korea and on searching for the tasks and plans for vitalizing citizen education, and since it is very difficult to characterize democratic citizen education in Korea without examining the overview of the general political education, citizenship education will be discussed in the context of political education regardless of its terminologies and contents. It should be noted that the phrase "democratic citizenship education" does not necessarily lead to true democratic citizenship education, and activities not referring to "democratic citizenship education" do not mean that it is not a democratic one.

III. Evolutionary Process of Political Education

Qualitatively and quantitatively, Korean citizenship education has achieved much less than the people have expected. The major reason for this is that previous Governments were not democratic. It is expected that in a country where the people are democratically trained, a dictatorship type government could not be endured. However, authoritarian governments tend to, without exception, concentrate their effort on producing people who are obedient to authority and who are disinterested in political matters, rather than to provide the opportunities for a democratic education to the people. All dictatorship type governments in history have attempted to establish a social condition causing people to be afraid of power and to maneuver people to be detached politically. Korean modern history shows that the authoritarian governments have made endeavors to produce submissive and politically apathetic people by means of education, mass media, and "repressive state apparatus," in Althusser's term, the national secret police. Even such an authoritarian government often disguises itself to represent democracy and to support education for democracy, which is nothing but a deceitful manipulating instrument.

Citizenship education in Korea has gone through constant ups and downs. Sometimes, it has been vigorously discussed and

limitedly practiced. But sometimes, it was greatly oppressed by the Government which used to consider people's demands for democracy as anti-government consciousness. Nevertheless, as Koreans' aspirations toward democracy rise, so do the demands for democratic citizenship education. Koreans who have elected a "non-military" president for the first time in 30 years through the normal election process, have come to realize more clearly that we cannot delay "democratic citizenship education" any longer. In other words, people are seeking ways to democratize political education or to practice democratic political education.

Of course, having rejected dictatorship and authority oriented governments does not naturally make a society democratic. If it is understood that democratization means to construct a "democratic community," which suggests togetherness of living, rather than seeking irresponsible individualistic or collective selfish interests, then all people should be consciously involved in repressing unregulated "selfishism," which might occur unlimitedly at a vulnerable time in social control, owing to the retreat of an authority oriented ruling. As we noticed in some situations in Latin America and several other countries, a temporarily enfeebled social controlling power, accompanyed by the democratization process, might weaken democracy and bring about a new dictatorship type government. Democratization, therefore, doesn't mean to promote irresponsible and unregulated freedom but should encourage a more mature community oriented consciousness which can be developed and furthered through exercising self-directed and self-regulating citizens' roles and responsibilities. Democratic communal consciousness is the pivotal element in preserving a democratic society.

The 1940s–1950s.

For three years, from the time of liberation from the Japanese imperialists in 1945 to the time of founding of the independent Korean Government in 1948, democratic educational ideas prevailed. Schooling system were transformed from Japanese imperialist schooling to a democratic system. Moreover, school curriculum included some content areas for the fulfillment of democratization. The most distinguished elements in curriculum reform were that the subject of "Civics" was assigned

two classes per week to the elementary school and it was selected as a new subject in the middle school, and the independent subjects of "Civics," "History," and "Geography" were unified as one subject title, "Social Studies" (Oh Chun-suk, 1975: 15-18). The subjects of "Civics," and "Social Studies" seemingly imitated the American school subjects which had often purported to teach the knowledge and attitudes necessary for being a citizen. At this time, since U.S. trained or influenced educators had a strong impact on educational policy making and administration, it was quite natural for American democratic education to become dominant.

However, with the establishment of the Korean government in 1948 and when the nationalist, An Ho-sang became the first Minister of Education, the emphasis on education for democracy diminished. He intensified efforts to fortify nationalistic education under the catch phrase of "Nationalistic-Democracy Education". He made clear the direction of Korean education as follows:

> . . . With the Military Governments of the U.S. and the Soviet Union after the oppressive Japanese colony, our national ideas and spirits are totally scattered, and our national identity is almost in danger of vanishing. Since we have instituted our own Government, the first thing we should do is to regain our national identity in order to construct the foundation for the unified independence. . . .
> Therefore, our education should be directed with universal ideas, aiming to regain our national identity, to understand human self and nature, and to be applicable to all the people in the world. (Oh Chun-suk, p.88)

An Ho-sang pointed out how his concept of "Nationalistic Democracy" was different from Western democracy. He stated that, "I call our education 'Democratic National Education' in order to distinguish our education from the Euro-American style of individual capitalism oriented democratic education and Soviet Union style of class, communism oriented democratic education." (Ibid, 89) Even though he added the adjective, "democratic," his purpose was to reinforce nationalistic education.

Since then, as the Rhee Syng-man Government converted into a dictatorship regime, education for democracy came to be more constricted. In 1954, the Ministry of Education made an official pronouncement of "the Standards of the Assignment of Class Time in Curriculum." In elementary and middle schools, curriculum was changed, replacing the 35 hours per year (more than an hour class time per week) which were assigned to the subject of "social studies" with the subject of "moral education." Two years later, in all the elementary, middle, and high schools, the term, "Self-Discipline" was substituted by the term, "Morality." (Ibid, 96) This change indicates that education focusing on engendering a law-abiding spirit and patriotic people was more stressed than education fostering democratic consciousness and attitudes. In the late 1950s, the atmosphere for worshipping President Rhee Syng-man was framed not only at school but also in the society. At this time, Rhee was even referred to as "National Father." During this time, democratic citizenship education conspicuously declined. During this period it was very hard to find any trace of democratic citizenship education in the field of adult education. Since adult education itself was at the beginning level, most of its activities centered around literacy and adult basic education. The interest toward education for democracy as well as political education, in general, was very low.

The 1960s.

Korean people who were aspiring toward democracy, brought down the dictatorship regime and established a democratic government, through the April 19th Revolution in 1960. Simultaneously, the need for democratic education rose and the government started to prepare for restoring democratic education. However, since the administration of the Democratic Party was short-ended by the military coup in May 1961, there was no time for any visible achievement.

The character of the Park Chung-hee military government could not be considered democratic. Since the government established by Park was authority oriented, it was hard to develop the expectation of vitalizing democratic citizenship education. Rather, the Park administration implemented systematic political education at the beginning of their rule in

order to impose their dominating ideology on the people.

The Park government made an official regulation to recite the statements of "Revolution Pledges" written to rationalize the military coup, not only in school but also at every public event. Additionally, in 1963, they initiated a complete school curriculum reform and instituted the subject "Anti-communism and Morality" to be a central subject and required it to be taught in elementary, middle, and high school. The previous Rhee Government had also set "Anti-communism" as one of the major educational goals but it became more intensified and systematized with the military government.

Political education for the people was carried out by a comprehensive, government centered movement, in the name of "National Movement for Reconstruction". This Movement consisted of various issues of life improvement, eradication of illiteracy, and preservation of social order, but the focus was on political education. The basic precept of this political education was that the only way to survive in the ideological struggle between North and South Korea was to retain the idea of "elimination of communism" and to win over North Korean communists through promoting vehement anti-communistic consciousness and steadfast obedience to the governmental instruction.

In spite of this uneasy situation, one significant educational project, which might be recorded as momentous in Korean democratic citizen education history, was developed by an educational research institute. The "democratic citizenship education project," created in 1962, was financially supported by the U.S. Cultural Center in Korea for six years. This project showed a strong determination and a contrived manifold strategy. The contents of this project are as follows (Central Educational Research Center, 1973):

> 1962-1967: Seminars for leaders and specialist of democratic citizenship education every year
> 1964-1966: Workshops for democratic citizenship education
> 1964: Monday class of public lecture for democracy
> 1966: Speech contest for democratic citizen
> 1967: Seminars for professors and students concerning citizenship education in the universities

However, this project, probably developed and planned by the Democratic Party Government, due to unexpected situations–the sudden emergence of the military government–could not bring forth a concrete accomplishment of the project's goals. Since seminars and workshops were in concentrated areas, this project could not embrace actual and practical educational activities. Moreover, the virtues necessary to be a democratic citizen, discussed in all the seven seminars, were focused more on facilitating a law-abiding, good citizen than on becoming an active democratic citizen. The suggested central concepts of democracy, according to this project, were respect of human rights, service and cooperation, fulfillment of responsibility, law-abiding and public morality, and selection of good leaders (Ibid.). Among these, "selection of good leaders" sounds ambiguous. The reason for the inclusion of this item might be related to the rationalization process that the military government devised for the justification of the entrance of military men to Government and politics which included the categorizing of civilian politicians as corrupt, irresponsible, and incapable leaders and made public this propaganda.

In 1968, the "National Education Charter" was publicly declared by the President. The military government regulated the Education Charter which was reminiscent of the "Imperial Education Ordinances" during the Japanese colony era, in that they were to be contained in all the textbooks of all schools and to be recited at all public events. Education that promoted active democratic citizenship was becoming more and more restricted. Government centered political education was expanding.

The 1970s-1980s.

Government-directed political education became more intensified in the 1970s. In 1971, the so called "October Revitalizing Reforms" or Yushin was proclaimed resulting in a rewriting of the Constitution. The Park Chung-hee regime maneuvered an uninterrupted fascistic system, by appealing to the employment of an efficient economic growth policy and an anti-Communist security policy. People's resistance, especially the resistance from intellectuals and students was very strong, but the governmental violent repression of this resistance was much stronger. This fascist government considered critical

education dangerous and the suppression became much greater. Moreover, the government employed systematic manipulation on the people's consciousness by total control of education and media.

"New Community Movement" or Saemaul Undong, under the government's forceful direction, intruded into all fields of society. In school, a new subject, "National Ethics", emerged as a required subject. Additionally, for the purpose of distribution of "the Yushin spirit," more than regular hours of "Learning of Yushin" was included in all the adult education organizations.

Due to the sudden collapse of the Park Chung-hee regime in 1979, a new military power took control and governed the 5th and the 6th Republics. These new military governments succeeded to the Park Government in ruling ideology and the way of governing people. They initiated another government-directed campaign so-called the "Society Purification Movement" and launched "national identity education" in order to teach people the regime's ideology or to manipulate the peoples' consciousness. Government, for the purpose of being based in law, fixed the contents of adult education programs in the Adult Education Law in 1982 and made the concept of duty required content to be taught in any kind of adult education activities.

> Article 7, Adult Education Law:
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> 1. In the adult education curriculum, for certain hours which are not part of the regulated time, the necessary contents for people's culture should be included.
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> Article 3 of the Enforcement Ordinance:
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> 1. . . . More than one percent of the adult education curriculum should contain the contents essential for people's culture.
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> 2. The contents essential for the adult education curriculum is defined as Korean history, national ethics, environmental education, economic education, national reunification and national security education, and new community movement education for the purpose of developing a national consciousness education.

The political education forced by the Government could bring forth the expected result owing to its perfunctory practices,

however, in reality, it worsened the ideological conflicts in the society. In spite of the Government's efforts to allocate "national ethics" as a required subject and to include it in the college entrance examination as one of major subject areas, it is very hard to find any proof as to whether the students who received the enforced study and were trained in "national ethics" have actually attained a higher consciousness or attitude in morality. Instead it has been argued that the ideological control by the Government stimulated young people toward communism (Lee Hwa-soo, 1994).

IV. Conclusion

A summary of the evolutionary process of political education from the time of independence to the end of 1980s shows that democratic citizenship education was emphasized and attempted during the short period right after independence and in the eary 1960s. During the rest of the time, one-sided, government centered nationalistic or administration protective political education was predominate. Nevertheless, the endeavor to enlighten citizens' consciousness undertaken by the small number of civil movement groups, critical anti-governmental movement groups, and student movements within this politically limited time period should be pointed out and recorded in political education history.

Even though some of these critical groups, often, have the tendency to criticize for the sake of criticism without developing constructive alternative ideas, their continuous, determined resistance and critiques under the oppressive fascistic and authority oriented governments should be recognized. Thanks to these critical groups, a basis for citizenship education could be envisioned without constructed difficulty. This indicates that the Korean peoples' strong will toward the actualization of democracy will not disappear despite any oppression they might face.

In 1993, the first non-militay government was instated. Naturally, the demand for democratic citizenship education is getting stronger. The people who understand the need for citizen education for democracy are mainly some civil groups and

thoughtful scholars. It is a very natural and understandable phenomena to want politicians and members of the National Assembly, regardless of their ideological or political orientations, to show their support of democratic citizenship education.

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