South Korea's Land Reform and Democracy

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This article aims to examine what sort of impact the South Korean land reform in 1950 had on democracy. I will mainly analyze (1) the international background, (2) legislation and execution, and (3) the change in relation between farmers and the state. In the context of the Cold War, this reform aimed to prevent socialist revolution by accommodating the demands of peasant revolution from the top. The land reform's social democratic character was minimized in its legislative process. The reform played a critical role in establishing the socioeconomic base for the liberal democratic and capitalist system. The National Assembly's management of the legislative process also provided a valuable experience for a procedural democracy. And as a result of the reform, the rural communities became more equal. The fact that farmers were liberated from the landlord system was also important in creating a pillar for rural democratization in the long run. Despite these positive points, the South Korean land reform also had its shortcomings and displayed democratic limitations. With the path to the development of farmers' autonomous organizations blocked, the real power in the rural communities at the myeon-level rested with the local administrators and elders. The South Korean land reform limited South Korean democracy to the framework of anticommunism and liberal democracy in the context of a global Cold War, while providing an experience in procedural democracy and the structural conditions for rural democratization.

Keywords: Land reform, democracy, authoritarianism, rural democratization, post-liberation South Korea

Introduction

This article aims to examine and reveal what sort of impact the South Korean land reform had on democracy in South Korea. Considering the fact that those under the bondage of a landlord system cannot form the foundation of a democracy as independent citizens, the liberation of farmers is considered an

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important condition to the full realization of democracy. For example, following World War II, the United States decided that land reform was indispensable for Japan's democratization. The U.S. military regime therefore pushed through the Japanese land reform (Dore 1959, 129-137; Montgomery 1984, 3, 117).

Examining different cases of land reform, however, one can easily surmise that land reform does not automatically result in democracy. While the immediate post-World War II period witnessed a wave of land reform throughout the Third World, such reforms often generated a situation where the landlords were replaced by an oppressive state authority that extracted agricultural surpluses for its gain. Indeed, authoritarianism became stronger in such countries (Powelson and Stock 1990, 4). In one study comparing the land reform programs of eight countries (including Colombia, India, and Taiwan), non-competitive systems proved to be more effective than competitive ones (Tai 1974, 468-73). While a "non-competitive system" does not automatically translate to democracy, the point that decentralization of authority through the existence of political parties and factions makes it easier for landlords to obstruct land reform does show the ineffective facet of democracy in land reform.

It is, therefore, difficult to posit a positive relationship between democracy and land reform. Thus, one may ask under what circumstances does land reform aid the advancement of democracy and when does land reform inhibit democracy? What sort of impact do the methods and particularities of land reform have upon a state's democratic system and ideology? Such questions are difficult to answer, as the varying conditions of each country that carried out land reform make any generalization difficult.1 Further, it is also difficult to precisely define democracy. Indeed, it is difficult to locate a connecting point between the predominately socioeconomic context of land reform and the largely political context of democracy.

This article focuses on South Korea as a case study and examines the interrelation between democracy and land reform in that country. It is difficult to find any research that examines the South Korean land reform and its relationship with democracy. The reason behind this lack of interest has to do with the undemocratic and authoritarian governing methods of the Syngman Rhee regime and the widespread presupposition that rural communities

1. For case studies of land reform in particular countries in South and Central American and East Asia as well as for comparative studies examining the correlation between land reform and democracy across regions, the reader is referred to Senior 1958; Dore 1959; Tai 1974; Riedinger 1995; Shunsaku 1999; Lapp 2004; and Anderson 2006.
constituted one political base of that regime. Sin Byeongsik argues that farmers became depoliticized through the land reform and turned into passive supporters of the Rhee regime (Sin 1992, 319). Kim Ilyeong notes that conservatized farmers were supporters of the authoritarianism of the Rhee regime (a Bonapartist system) (Kim 2004, 171-72). Bak Myeongnim places special emphasis on the conformism of farmers by stating that this conformism, created through the land reform and war, replaced the once-vibrant activism of South Korean farmers. Bak argues that rural South Korea was transformed from a base of resistance to a base of support for the regime (Bak 1998, 114-116).

It is true that South Korean farmers, in contrast to their urban counterparts, supported the Rhee regime in various elections throughout the 1950s. However, the relationship between land reform and democracy is not limited to the issue of farmers’ political propensities. It is a larger and more complex question related to systemic issues as well as to the procedural aspects of democracy in the rural areas. In this sense, the question of the relationship between South Korea’s land reform and democracy requires a more multifaceted approach. In this article, I attempt to focus on the land reform of South Korea from the following three angles.

First, I want to focus on the international context of land reform. Following World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States entered upon a global ideological rivalry in which they each promoted their political-economic system of “liberal democracy” and “new democracy” (or “people’s democracy”), respectively. The Korean peninsula was directly influenced by the struggle between these two powers, and both the North and South carried out their respective land reforms in the name of democratization. Through these reforms, the systemic characteristics of the two Koreas became clear. Under American influence, the land reform of South Korea ended up weakening socialist or social democratic tendencies while moving the country towards the establishment of an anti-communist liberal democratic system. In this sense, the case of South Korea is a suitable example for examining the relationship between land reform and the systemic/ideological competition in the name of democracy.

The second aspect I wish to examine is the process of land reform. Farmers did not play a leading role in either the legislation or the execution of the South Korean land reform. However, the integrity of procedural democracy was nevertheless maintained through a competition between different factions in the National Assembly that led to dialogue and negotiations over the character of the land reform. The state, of course, was authoritarian in carrying out the land reform—the South Korean government at the center often forcefully mobilized local administrative organizations to purchase, distribute, and redeem farmland.
However, the state established farmland committees nationwide composed of both landlords and farmers in order to collect information and carry out civil suits in cases where interests clashed. The appearance of procedural democracy was therefore kept. The duality of the institutionalization of democracy and authoritarian practice is a particular characteristic of the Syngman Rhee regime (Bak 1998, 123). Such a dualism is indispensable in understanding the particularities of democracy in South Korea.

The third aspect has to do with the results of the land reform. In the South Korean case, the state replaced landlords and increased its authoritarian influence and control over the rural communities. In this sense, the South Korean land reform is typical of land reform cases from the Third World. However, the South Korean land reform was more thorough in its destruction of the landlord system, and the significance of its “liberation” of farmers cannot be overstated.² It is also important to note that the strengthening of the state’s reach does not necessarily mean that farmers became more dependent vis-à-vis the state. While continuing to support the regime, South Korean farmers of the 1950s also distanced themselves from the regime at times by expressing dissent regarding the state’s agricultural policy and by resisting the state’s attempts to seize agricultural surpluses. From a macroscopic context, it is important to note that the land reform, despite its limitations, did create a starting point for democratization in rural South Korea.

Paying particular attention to the preceding points, I first aim to examine the American intervention in the systemic and ideological direction of the land reform in the context of the Cold War. Following this, I will examine the legislation, execution, and results of the land reform while considering the duality of procedural democracy versus actual democracy.

2. The assessment of Jang Sanghwan (1985) that the land reform was successful in dismantling the landlord system is a common one. If one includes the sale of restituted land (guisok mongji), i.e. lands formerly owned by the Japanese, the total amount of land involved in the South Korean land reform came to 560,000 jeongbo, which accounted for only about 40.4 percent of landholdings as of 1945. The overall effect, however, was much greater due to the sale of land that took place prior to the land reform. As a result of this, the tenancy rate dropped to around 10% in the 1950s (Jang 1994, 113-114). According to the study of Powelson and Stock, which comparatively analyzed land reforms in the Third World, including such countries as the Philippines and Mexico, the land reforms in South Korea and Taiwan are considered to be relatively comprehensive and equalitarian (Powelson and Stock 1990, 235-67).
Influence of the Cold War on the Democratic Characteristics of Land Reform

1. The Expansion of the Liberal Democratic Perspective on Land Reform by the U.S. Military Government in Korea

In the wake of World War II, there was a global explosion in passion for nation-state building and land reform. The United States and the Soviet Union, the two primary victors of the war that were to dominate the postwar world order, intervened in these trends in order to expand their own ideological systems as well as to create friendly regimes. Considering the fact that World War II was defined as a battle between fascism and democracy, the two superpowers both framed their interventions in the name of democracy. In their zones of influence in Eastern Europe, North Korea, and elsewhere, the Soviet Union supported popular democratic land reform in the name of democratic reform. In response, the United States also intervened in land reform efforts in order to stymie communist revolution while expanding liberal democracy (Montgomery 1984, 117-18, 127-31).

In a number of regions in Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere, the United States used land reform as a policy tool in order to inject American institutions and values. In addition to the more defensive rationale of stopping the spread of ideas for social revolution in rural communities, the land reform also reflected the traditional American value and conviction that free landowners are the true bastions of liberal democracy. The conviction that “small farms” and “small towns” are the basis of American freedom continues to this day (Montgomery 1984, 128-31). This conviction can also be found in W. I. Ladejinsky, the “architect” of land reform in Japan. In discussing the Japanese land reform, Ladejinsky once explained his perspective on democracy by quoting Senator T.H. Benton:

The freeholder ... is a natural supporter of free government, and it should be the policy of republics to multiply their freeholders, as it is the policy of monarchies to multiply tenants. (Ladejinsky 1977, 287)

According to this conviction, the United States intervened deeply in postwar land reform efforts in such places as the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. What was the nature of the American intervention in South Korea?

The starting point of the United States’ interest in and plans for land reform
in South Korea can be found in its support for the "left-right cooperation movement" (jwauk hapjak undong) in 1946. At a time when the political right in southern Korea refused to participate in the U.S.-Soviet Joint Commission, the U.S. military government sought to carry out its plans by using the centrists of the "left-right-cooperation movement." The U.S. military government included among its ranks those such as A.C. Bunce who emphasized reform. The U.S. military government sought socioeconomic reforms under the premise of anti-communism, and this was the key element connecting American plans with the centrists of Korea. The "Left-Right Cooperation Committee" (Jwau hapjak wiwonhoe) presented seven principles in an effort to create a plan for land reform that merged the viewpoints of the political left and right. According to this plan, while the farmers were to receive distributed land for free, the landlords also had the option of selling their land (Kim et al. 1989, 328; Bang 2001, 114-15).

The policy of preventing revolution through land reform was also a dilemma for the United States—namely, the dilemma of having to transfer landlords' land to tenants while still upholding the principle of private property. The way to minimize this problem was to compensate landlords and thereby present them with opportunities of becoming industrial capitalists. The redistributed land, meanwhile, would have to be paid for by the farmers in order for them to take ownership. Such methods would protect the integrity of the principle of private property while creating a basis for the market economy. The plan by the Left-Right Cooperation Committee, therefore, dovetailed with the intentions of the United States and its military government in Korea.

While supporting the "left-right cooperation movement," the U.S. military government in Korea led the centrists to join the right-dominated "Democratic Committee" (Minju uiwon) in order to create and legislate the land reform program. In December 1947, the Acting Military Governor Charles Helmick actively supported the land reform legislation by emphasizing that the said legislation established a great way of compensating landlords while also protecting the sanctity of those individual rights indispensable for democracy (Joseon ilbo, December 28, 1947).

Taking its plan of protecting private property rights through the selling of ex-Japanese lands as a fait accompli, the U.S. military government envisioned the establishment of liberal democracy in South Korea through its plan for land reform. The selling of former Japanese-owned lands began in March of 1948. Military Governor William F. Dean emphasized the importance of the fact that "500,000 households became free landowners in a free country" (Donga ilbo,
March 23, 1948). As of September 1948, 199,029 jeongbo3 of formerly Japanese-owned lands were sold to 505,072 households (Hanguk nongchon gyeongje yeongguwon 1986, 177). Through the selling of formerly Japanese-owned lands under the U.S. military government, the prospect of land reform became unavoidable.

2. Ebbing of the Social Democratic Reform Plan in the Context of the Cold War

From the start, the American conviction that the proliferation of free landowners could form the foundation of a liberal democratic system did not gain widespread acceptance in South Korea. The ideological propensity of the Korean peninsula during the immediate post-liberation years was more radical and drawn more to social democracy than American-style liberal democracy. This was not something limited to socialists—many right-wing nationalists also argued for the establishment of a more equal socioeconomic system. Individual property rights were secondary in their goals. This can be found in the public stance taken by the Korean Provisional Government, particularly in their so-called “Principle of Three Equalities” (samgyun jiuui). Based on these principles, the Korean Provisional Government emphasized the public interest over individual freedom and argued for the nationalization of land and major industries (Kim 2000a, 41-2). The propensity for equalitarianism can also be found in the first temporary clause of the Democratic Committee, set forth in March 1946. It argued for the establishment of an independent nation dedicated to complete political, economic, and educational equality.

The land reform plan of the Democratic Committee of December 1947 abided by the American wishes of landlord compensation and credit distribution. In addition, the Democratic Committee limited land ownership for farmers—farmers could only hold onto their lands for the purpose of farming, and all transactions, mortgaging, bestowing, and exchanging of farmland required government approval (Gang 1994, 14). This policy was different from the liberalist American perspective that views free dealing as the hallmark of private property.

Following the establishment of the South Korean state in 1948, the South Korean government immediately created a committee for land reform legislation. The members of this group included those with social democratic tendencies, such as the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Jo Bongam, the

3. A jeongbo 町歩 is a unit of land measurement (1 jeongbo = 0.992 ha.)
Vice-Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Gang Jeongtaek, and the Director of Planning Yi Suntak. The first draft of the land reform bill (the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry draft) produced by the committee in November 1948 granted the role of overseer to the state and limited individual property rights. "In order to prohibit the abuse of land ownership and ensure the economic stabilization of farmers," the draft prohibited free transactions, bestowals, and other types of title transfers. The draft bill also prohibited using land as collateral (Nongji gaehyeoksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 1970, 373).

After the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry draft was publicized, the Donga ilbo, the newspaper closely associated with the Korean Democratic Party, in an editorial dated November 26, 1948, criticized the limitations of property rights to farmland. It argued that there was no need to limit transactions given the limitations placed upon how much land one person could own. It also criticized the forced inheritance of farmland.

The land reform bill was amended in January 1949 after public hearings were held at provincial seats throughout the country. The revised version of the bill now stated that limitations to transactions of farmland would only be in place until the land was fully paid for by the new tenants. In other words, farmers were free to sell their land once the land reform was completed. In this case, had social democratic elements been entirely removed from the South Korean land reform? During the aforementioned public hearings at provincial seats, Gang Jinguk, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry official in charge of land reform, made public speeches—entitled "the ideals of land reform"—discussing the spirit of land reform’s relationship to the South Korean constitution. He argued that the constitution did not call for "a state-based social democracy." Instead, according to Gang, the constitution called for "a nation-based socialism" that should limit individual property rights if such limitations served the greater public good. He argued that the land reform, in return, should aim for the greater public good (Nongji gaehyeoksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe 1970, 370). The existence of the systematic state control of farmland and farmers reflected such a spirit. While the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry composed the land reform bill in accordance with the principles of capitalism and liberal democracy, it also reflected its social democratic propensity within the context of the public good.5

4. For the amended Land Reform Act, see Kim et al. 1989, 1201-05.
5. Though the constitution declared a commitment to social and economic equality for all, in reality the foundation of society was clearly based on capitalism and the guarantee of private property, in defense of which it was recognized the state would intervene (Sin 2009, 37).
The content of the land reform bill did not change through the process of legislation in the National Assembly. In addition to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry draft, the government draft (the Office of Planning draft) and the National Assembly Industry Committee draft also prohibited land dealings prior to the completion of the land reform (Kim et al. 1989, 1203-09). During the debate over the land reform bill legislation, National Assemblyman Yi Seonghak of Ilmin Gurakbu argued there was no clause preventing future abuses after the land reform. Another National Assemblyman, Kim Dongjun of the Seonginhoe 成仁會, also expressed his fear that the landlord-tenant system might return after the land reform’s completion. However, the arguments for limiting land transactions remained a minority voice. In the end, the exclusiveness of land ownership and rights for free transactions were guaranteed (Kim et al. 1989, 500-10; Kim 2001, 148).

The decline of social reformism can also be detected in the abandonment of the “cooperative association” bill, ardently developed and promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry headed by Jo Bongam. The National Assembly did not even debate on this bill. Private property rights in the countryside may have been a prerequisite for the establishment of a capitalistic and liberal democratic system, but they alone were not sufficient. Even when individuals owned land, they could not become active participants in a democracy if they still lacked the economic resources to be self-sufficient. Contrary to conditions in the United States, Korea’s enormous surplus agricultural population all but guaranteed that 78.6 percent of all farming households would still have less than 1 jeongbo of farmland—the minimum needed for self-sufficiency—after the land reform (Kim et al. 1989, 1041).

Regarding this problem, the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry believed that, because of the ratio of population to farmland in Korea, economic self-sufficiency was improbable from the start. The solution, therefore, had to be cooperative agricultural associations that would guarantee the self-sufficiency of farming households through mutual cooperation (Bang 2001, 124-25). Gang Jinguk argued that cooperative associations should be formed first, and the program for land reform should then be based on those associations (Gang 1952, 57). Arguments that cooperative associations should be the principle agents of land reform can also be heard from contemporary media outlets. The Joseon ilbo, for example, argued that cooperative organizations and other autonomous bodies that represent farmers must work with the state in carrying out the land reform (Joseon ilbo, November 25, 1948). However, the National Assembly’s Committee on Industry did not even put the issue up for debate (Gang 1952, 57).
While the necessity of cooperative associations was widely embraced, more discussions were needed in terms of how to form such associations. How could these associations become truly autonomous bodies representing the interests of farmers without becoming the hotbeds of leftists? How could they absorb the financial associations and agricultural associations from the colonial era? Before such discussions could take place, the National Assembly hastily passed the bill for political purposes.

Such developments were contrary to what happened in Japan, where land reform accompanied the establishment of rural autonomy and cooperative associations under the banner of democratization. The United States, in its occupation of Japan, was persistent in the matter of rural democratization. In South Korea, the frontline of anti-communism, the United States and the Korean right wing were more interested in the establishment of private property rights that would support a liberal democratic system than democratization. The South Korean land reform gradually lost its equalitarian social democratic and social reformist elements, to be replaced by liberal democratic ideas that emphasized individual private property owners and their rights. This is a prime example of how the systemic and ideological confrontations of the period influenced the direction of socioeconomic reform in Korea.

In the next section, I want to examine the legislative process of land reform in the context of procedural democracy. Following this, I will touch upon the state-dominated authoritarian implementation of the South Korean land reform.

Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Legislative and Executive Processes of Land Reform

1. The National Assembly-Centered Legislation of Land Reform

The South Korean National Assembly dominated the process of legislating the country’s land reform. The Constitutional Assembly (Jeheon uihoe) had written the land reform in the constitution, making it irreversible. While the executive branch submitted the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry draft on land reform, the National Assembly allowed various inputs from different political parties and factions to come into play. A number of discussions took place

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6. For more detailed examinations of the growth of Japan’s agrarian reform cooperatives and local autonomy, see Dore 1959, Chapter 4 and Minamura 1995, 193-99.
based on the original draft as well as on inputs from politicians to produce the final version of the land reform bill in April 1949. The U.S. government did not actively intervene in this legislative process.

At the time of legislation, Syngman Rhee did not have the direct support of any political party in the National Assembly. The National Assembly at this time was comprised largely of three factions—the Korean Democratic Party (Hanguk minjudang), a junior group, and a group of smaller third parties. The junior assemblymen, many of whom were members of groups such as the Donginhoe 同仁會 and Seonginhoe, were political progressives who advocated for the withdrawal of foreign troops as well as economic equalitarianism. They often went beyond the boundary of anti-communism in advocating their agendas. The junior group allied with smaller third parties such as ljeonghoe 以正會, that were anti-communist but emphasized rural reform. Due to this alliance, the landlord-centered Korean Democratic Party had a difficult time in the legislative process of effectively safeguarding the interests of landlords (Kim 2001, 141-50). Furthermore, the Korean Democratic Party could also not be entirely bounded by their interest vis-à-vis landlords due to their commitments in pushing for conservative agendas in state building, society, and the economy. Because of this, the Korean Democratic Party took a conciliatory position on the land reform. Hong Seongha, the Korean Democratic Party representative who took part in the legislative process, conceded that the land reform was needed to reform the foundations of the country's feudal economic system and to establish the basis of a democratic country (Gyeongbyang sinmun, January 1, 1949). Under the premise of landlord compensation, the Korean Democratic Party demanded a higher rate of landlord compensation and planned for transforming landlords into industrial capitalists. When their demands were partially met, the land reform bill passed with support from across the political spectrum (Kim et al. 1989, 441-45; Sin 2001, 39-40).

In June 1949, the South Korean National Assembly declared that all tenant lands and all self-cultivated lands greater than three jeongbo would be confiscated. Landlords would be compensated at the rate of 150 percent of the average annual yields of their confiscated lands, and the recipient farmers would then pay back the state for their land grant at the rate of 25 percent of the average annual yields for five years. The difference would be made up by the payments the state would receive from distributing formerly Japanese-owned lands (Kim et al. 1989, 1212-13). This plan was advantageous for the farmers. Of course, the National Assembly of South Korea excluded the left and was composed of centrists and rightists. However, the fact that an issue as controversial as this one could pass through democratic debates and be legislated through
proper political processes can be considered a historic success for the National Assembly as an institution.

While the National Assembly dominated the process of legislation, President Syngman Rhee had a difficult time utilizing the land reform for his own political gain. While Rhee made his intentions behind the land reform public by appointing the socialist-leaning Jo Bongam as the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Rhee was largely marginalized in the legislative process of land reform. It was Jo who wrote up the initial draft through the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and there was not much Rhee could do in the National Assembly without a political party of his own. Furthermore, Rhee’s public image regarding the land reform took a hit when the government rejected the bill and sent it back to the National Assembly for its lack of a concrete plan in making up the abovementioned 25 percent difference between landlord compensation and recipient payments. After being sent back, a revised version of the bill was completed in February 1950. The final draft was promulgated in March 1950 (Kim et al. 1989, 551-70).

The National Assembly’s display of autonomy and the integrity of procedural democracy do not conform to Tai’s thesis that the existence of a competitive system serves as an obstacle to land reform. According to Tai’s comparative work on land reform, as discussed in the introduction, competitive systems function as obstacles to successful land reform. Competitive political systems provide larger room for landlords to make their voices heard and influence politicians to represent their interests. In such cases, according to Tai, landlords can negatively influence the speed, effectiveness, and degree of reform. By contrast, Tai argues that revolutionary or authoritarian regimes are more effective in instituting reform due to the greater degree of separation between the political elite and landlords (Tai 1974, 469). In South Korea, however, the land reform bill was clearly advantageous to farmers and also passed with the procedural democracy intact. A number of factors contributed to this outcome: the distribution of formerly Japanese-owned land in the context of a heated conflict between the left and right, the fact that many landlords sold their lands at the prospect of land reform, the stipulation of land reform in the constitution, and the relative autonomy of the constitutional National Assembly from President Syngman Rhee and the Korean Democratic Party.

The maintenance of the integrity of procedural democracy and the autonomy of the National Assembly through the legislative process stand out even when compared to seemingly similar cases in Taiwan and Japan. Let us briefly compare the legislative processes of land reform for the three East Asian countries: South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan.
In Japan under American occupation, the Japanese government submitted the first draft of its land reform bill to the National Diet in December 1945. The bill stipulated that all land holdings of absentee landlords and all self-cultivated lands exceeding 5 ha would be transferred within five years to create independent farmers throughout the country. However, the percentage of land marked for distribution was only around 38 percent of all tenant lands. Considering this insufficient, the U.S. military government ordered a revision of the bill by March 15, 1946. The Allied Council of Japan, dominated by the United States, also sent its recommendations on the issue of land reform to the Japanese government. Its recommendation was a de facto command to the Japanese government. In response, the Japanese government presented a second bill, which was passed by the National Diet in October 1946. The second land reform bill stated that all tenant lands and all self-cultivated lands exceeding 1 ha (with Hokkaido being an exception at 4 ha) would be confiscated by the state with compensation. The lands would then be distributed to tenants for a price within a two-year period (Teruoka 2004, 144-50).

In the case of Taiwan, the Joint Sino-American Commission on Rural Reconstruction (also known as JCCR) was formed in 1948. This organization, founded with the goal of supporting rural reconstruction in Taiwan, was composed of three Chinese and two American board members. It was this organization that led the land reform in Taiwan from 1949 (Sin 1988, 48-9). There were several reasons why the Nationalist regime in Taiwan decided to proceed with the land reform. First, it wanted to improve the economic conditions of the island, as it was exacerbated by the civil war and the mass influx of refugees from the mainland. Second, the Nationalist regime wanted to lessen native Taiwanese resistance to its rule. Most importantly, it learned from its experience on the Chinese mainland that rural communities under the landlord system could transform into bases for communists. The Taiwanese land reform began in April 1949 when the provincial assembly legislated the land reform bill. The provincial assembly of Taiwan at the time was largely made up of native Taiwanese landlords who were against the land reform. However, due to the mainland domination of the government, the provincial assembly could do nothing more than review and recognize the bill (Sin 1988, 55-7). All units of the Nationalist Party were instructed to pay particular attention to the land reform during its process (Powelson and Stock 1990, 255).

As shown, the Japanese land reform was carried out under the duress of U.S. military occupation, while the Taiwanese land reform took place in the context of U.S.-supported mainland domination of the island. In short, land reform in both countries was forced from the outside.
In contrast to the cases of Japan and Taiwan, the delay of land reform in South Korea until after the establishment of the state enabled the reform to proceed via democratic procedures. The process of legislation through the National Assembly also legitimized the democratic practices of the country. Of course, the integrity of democratic procedures only applies to the process of legislation. Authoritarianism in the process of executing land reform makes the South Korean case similar to other non-Western nations, such as Taiwan and Japan.

2. State-Dominated, Authoritarian Execution and the Appearance of Democratic Procedures

The process of execution is as important for land reform as the legislative process. In a number of cases, land reform programs that have been democratically legislated were later distorted by authoritarian regimes. President Syngman Rhee may have maintained the form of democracy, but he preferred authoritarian methods of rule. When entrusted with the execution of South Korean land reform, Syngman Rhee redefined the program in his own way and carried out the program using authoritarian state apparatuses.

Seeing himself as a national father figure for all classes of Koreans, Syngman Rhee sought to develop an image of himself as one who could relate to both farmers and landlords in the land reform. In a public speech on December 4, 1948, Syngman Rhee emphasized the need for farmers, landlords, and capitalists to mutually benefit and help each other for the betterment of the nation (Seoul sinmun December 7, 8, and 10, 1948). The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, which had conservatized following the resignation of its first minister Jo Bongam, published a text in response to Rhee’s speech, titled “The Land Reform and What I Should Do: Land Reform Guidelines.” In the introduction to this text, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Yun Yeongseon argued that the main goal of land reform was nation-state building based on national ethics. In its conclusion, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry official Kim Seongchan argued: “for the state, the spirit of legislation depends on it being shared by everyone.” He added, “What supports the state is the entire citizenry. Landlords are citizens. Tenants, laborers, and factory owners are also citizens. All citizens must work together in order for the nation-state to properly develop” (Kim 1950, 1-2). The ideological switch from democracy to national cooperation coincides with the context of Syngman Rhee’s acceptance of “one people-ism” (ilminjuui). The state-centered philosophy on land reform becomes clearer in the process of the land reform’s execution.
Although the National Assembly created the land reform bill through democratic procedures, its execution was unilateral on the part of the Syngman Rhee regime. The Rhee regime sometimes did things without any legal foundation. The proclamation of the land reform bill was made on March 10, 1950. Its enforcement ordinance came on March 25, 1950, enforcement regulations on April 28, 1950, and the redetermination of distribution was proclaimed on June 23, 1950. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, however, used its branch offices throughout the country to initiate the program on March 28, 1950—at a time when even enforcement regulations had not yet been released. The land reform was carried out using the local governments at the country level as well as myeon and ri levels.

To assist local governments in carrying out the land reform, land committees were formed throughout the country. The composition of land committees was laid down by presidential decree. All committee members nominated were to be educated, well-recognized, and impartial members of their local communities. While committee members of the provincial, city, county, eup, and myeon levels were to be recommended by the heads of local government, committee members at the dong and ri levels were recommended by locals and commissioned by the heads of the eup or myeon. Both government officials and civilians were to form part of committees at the provincial, city, county, eup, and myeon levels, with a civilian majority. Committees at the dong and ri levels were to be composed entirely of civilians. As for the civilian members of the committee at the city, county, eup, and myeon levels, they would be comprised of landlords and tenants in equal numbers. The designated role for these committees was to counsel the head of local government in matters related to the land reform. Particularly, the land committees at the eup and myeon levels were to work with the local government in matters of confiscation, distribution, compensation, land improvement, and land preservation (Nongnimbu nongji gwalliguk 1950, 49). This enforcement of a balance between landlords and tenants in committee membership can also be found in the case of Japan (Dore 1959, 133). Similarly in Taiwan, a substantial number of tenants joined local influentials on the rural tenant committees (Tai 1974, 401). The cases of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, all widely considered successful in their respective dismantling of the landlord system, are similar in this regard.

According to several case studies of the myeon-level land committees, official reports stated that the committee head was the head of the myeon while tenants and landlords comprised the remainder of the committee in equal numbers. The actual numbers, however, often favored tenants—there were often not enough landlords to make up half of the local land committees (Yi

The provincial land committees had the important task of adjudicating in landlord-tenant conflicts in their local branches. For example, the provincial land committee of Gyeongsangnam-do adjudicated a number of conflicts between landlords and tenants in June 1950, and a majority appear to have favored the tenants (Jayu minbo, June 25, 1950). By contrast, the Busan land committee's decisions in 1952 appear to have favored the landlords more than the tenants (Minju sinbo, July 18, 1952 and March 13, 1953). The land committees at all levels, while centered on government officials, involved participation by landlords and tenants who were recognized by the official authorities. In this way, farmers partly influenced the shaping of the South Korean land reform.

On the other hand, a significant number of civil actions broke out between the state (the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and other state organizations involved in the land reform) and people impacted by the reform. The total number of civil suits between 1953 and 1970 related to the land reform numbered 1,312 (Kim et al. 1989, 900).

The authoritarian character of the land reform was particularly evident in the ways the state received payments from land recipients. While the rules stated that payments could be made in both cash and kind, once the Korean War broke out, the state demanded that the payments be made exclusively in kind in order to support the war effort. In the case of Nonsan, the county office issued payment bills and actively encouraged timely payments. When the war broke out, county officials even demanded families packing to flee the expanding war front make payments for their lands (Kim et al. 1989, 682).

As can be seen, the state dominated the execution of the land reform, employing authoritarian methods to confiscate, distribute, and collect payments by mobilizing central and local government offices throughout the country. By creating advisory land committees and permitting civil suits to take place, the state maintained the outward appearance of procedural democracy.

Rural Social Consciousness, Changes in Power Structure and the Limits to Rural Democratization

Thus far, we have discussed the rise of the notion of liberal democracy (at the expense of social democratic philosophy) in the South Korean land reform in the context of the North-South and left-right conflict and American intervention. We have also mentioned how the integrity of procedural
democracy was maintained in the legislative process for land reform but not in the rather authoritarian method of carrying out that reform. This being said, we may now ask to what extent did rural communities democratize through the land reform?

It is true that farmers, who had been made independent farmers by the land reform, became supporters of the anti-communist system and lent both active and passive support to the Syngman Rhee regime. However, such rural support for Syngman Rhee is not enough to conclude that the land reform therefore did not contribute to the democratization of South Korea’s rural communities. The land reform destroyed the landlord class that had been ruling rural Korea through economic means. The yangban class, which relied on the landlord system, also lost its economic base through the land reform. Considering these points, the liberation of farmers from the landlord system is not insignificant as the starting point of rural democratization. While the administrative power of the state replaced the landlord class in terms of power, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the relationship between the state and farmers was neither one-way nor subordinative. Let us now examine changes to the social consciousness of farmers following their liberation from the landlord system.

1. Limits of Social Consciousness in Rural Communities and Changes in Power Relationships

The destruction of the landlord system and landlord class also resulted in the weakening of the bonds between family clans. Observation records as well as findings from field work agree on this point. Pak Ki-Hyŏk and Sidney Gamble, through their field work in three clan villages in three different counties between 1961 and 1962, concluded that the primary force behind the fundamental transformation of rural social structure in South Korea was the land reform. Kinship bonds as well as the degree of control exerted by clans substantially decreased following the reform. This was because the landlords who were to carry the clan on their backs, particularly in the planning and execution of expensive clan rituals, disappeared along with the tenants. With the weakening of kinship bonds, Confucian tradition also lost much of its authority. Evidence suggests that the young often did not believe in traditional ethics and tended to ignore them. In the Choe clan village of Taedae-ri in Ichon-gun, someone from a minority family became the leader of the 4-H Club. In the Bak clan village of Sinho-ri in Milyang-gun, three former tenants joined the ranks of the six largest landholders in the village. The massive rural exodus was another reason behind the weakening of clan bonds and control (Pak and Gamble 1975, 188-90).
Another study on Sagok village in Sugok-myeon, Jinyang-gun, Gyeongsangnam-do also suggests that the land reform dealt a devastating blow to the yangbanlandlord class. With the dismantling of the landlord system there, traditional yangban ways of life became impossible (Jeong 2000, 202-03). The Conlon Associates report on South Korean society, compiled at the request of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, emphasizes the changes emanating from rural communities from the late 1950s:

There is no blind worship of a national hero on the one hand, no meek obedience to the orders of the village headmen on the other. Increasingly, even the rural electorate appear to consult their “self-interest” when they cast ballot ... Korean society at present is extremely complex, and in a state of great flux and transformation. The historic conservatism of this people, especially the peasantry, is being moderated by rapid socioeconomic changes. (Conlon Associates, Ltd. 1959, 113)\(^7\)

As the quoted report notes, South Korean society of the 1950s was in flux and the rural communities were no exception. Traditional forms of authority were disappearing at the national as well as the local level. The conservatism of farmers was weakening under the pressures of rapid socioeconomic change. Such change, of course, had its source not entirely in the land reform, and we and cannot ignore the influence of other factors, such as the Korean War. However, the equalization of social classes through the land reform was nonetheless an important factor.

However, the destruction of traditional authority was not a sufficient factor in itself to usher in rural democratization. Furthermore, the equalization of rural society does not automatically mean either democratization or the equalization of the power structure in the rural communities. The rural power structure of the 1950s still did not center on farmers—democracy had not yet been institutionalized. Let us now examine a few case studies that analyze changes in the rural power structure.

According to Hong Seongchan’s study of the case of Dongbok-myeon, Hwasun-gun, in Jeollanam-do, individuals who dominated the local community during the colonial period as great landlords and local officials continued to dominate the local community into the 1950s as local state officials and party officers of the ruling Liberal Party. At the same time, however, those who had lower political and social statuses—such as recipient farmers and merchants of

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\(^7\) The author of this report has been identified as Robert A. Scalapino, a well-known authority on Northeast Asian issues (Bak 2007, 132).
different kinds—started to be co-opted into the local power structure (Hong 1992, 316-26). In the case of Yongin-gun in Gyeonggi-do, an increasing number of local officials emerged from non-landlord families. Furthermore, even in the case of the Yongin-gun officials who hailed from former landlord families, the pool appears to have enlarged—greater proportions of them came from landlord families with smaller holdings than before (Choe 1998, 259-61). Looking at the entirety of Chungcheongbuk-do, the majority of local officials at the myeon-level were in their forties, having been born between 1905 and 1915. They went through secondary schooling and began their young adulthood under the system of wartime mobilization under Japanese rule. Most of them were elected in their home regions based on their administrative backgrounds during the colonial period and their record of anti-communism following liberation. Those with records of anti-communism were particularly salient in places with serious incidents of left-right conflict. In the case of two myeon of the region, more local officials came from tenant backgrounds than landlord backgrounds. However, most of them were not full-time farmers and had local administrative experience of some kind. Therefore, farmers who joined the local power structure in the 1950s were often those who were likely to be under the influence of central power through administrative experience and anti-communism rather than those who truly represented the interests of farmers (Kim 2003, 86-92).

Looking over the above case studies, one can conclude that those with landlord backgrounds were gradually losing power at the local scene. However, as can be seen in the local elections that ended up supporting the power base of the Syngman Rhee regime, the introduction of those with farmer backgrounds into the local political and administrative scene cannot be seen as a result of rural democratization. What is more likely is that the desires of farmers who wanted to raise their status mutually interacted with the Syngman Rhee regime's goal of turning rural South Korea into its power base. In other words, the expanding state power replaced the landlords in rural South Korea in the 1950s. Even at the ri-level, those in charge were often local administrators or local elders and not young farmers. Such a trend can also be found in the work of Korean sociologist Yi Mangap (Lee Man-Gap), who studied the rural communities of the 1960s (Lee 1982, 195-97).

Without the creation of democratic institutions such as autonomous cooperative associations, rural South Korea in the 1950s witnessed what can be defined as "re-traditionalization." Types of nepotism based on social networks and communities started to influence voting behaviors, and those with landlord and administrator backgrounds started to make strides in local elections. Family
clans also started to exert greater influence upon local politics. Such phenomena cannot be seen as a simple case of regression, but a case of conservative modernization in traditional grab, carried out by South Korean farmers in response to the city-centered modernization project (Choe 1994, 107; Gang 1999, 282-90).

2. Farmers' Distrust of and Resistance to State Policies

While the land reform dismantled the landlord class, farmers did not necessarily fill the vacuum left by the landlords. While the U.S. military government and the Syngman Rhee regime destroyed the landlord class, they also suppressed social revolutionary movements carried out by the farmers and controlled the farmers using state organizations such as financial organizations (Yi 1998, 213-15).

South Korean farmers also had a hard time having their interests represented through party politics. Given the two-party system comprised of two conservative parties—the Korean Democratic Party and the Liberal Party—class interests of farmers also could not be easily represented at the national level. Of course, the emergence of the pro-farmer Progressive Party in the 1950s displayed the possibility of rural democratization. The Progressive Party's insistence on solving the problem of usurious loans in the rural communities and on the establishment of agricultural cooperatives shows that farmers could have their interests represented through party politics at the national level. Jo Bongman, the chairman of the Progressive Party, who had served as the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, introduced a bill on the agricultural cooperatives, and masterminded the opening of a national preparatory congress for farmers. Jo and his party had the base to connect with the farmers in an organized fashion (Bak 1995, 172-78, 288-91). However, the political institutionalization of rural democracy was obstructed with the execution of Jo and the Progressive Party's disbandment.

With the possibility of organizing and democratization ruled out, farmers' dissatisfaction towards the state agricultural policy could find no representative voice at the national level. What farmers could do was to handle things passively and individually by distrusting the state policy on agriculture. Jang Sanghwan, who sees the 1950s as a period without farmers' movements, still recognizes cases of individual resistance in the form of rejection of tax duty as well as demands for the reduction of payments for distributed lands. Many farmers also sought to create cooperatives at the local level and carry out projects for local development (Jang 2010, 18-21).

Farmers' resistance to taxation was widespread, and such cases of resistance
Table 1. Comparison of the Total Agricultural Production and State Collection (unit: seok*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Production (A)</th>
<th>Land Acquisition Tax (B)</th>
<th>Land Repayment</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total Tax Collection (C)</th>
<th>B/A</th>
<th>C/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>17,009,646</td>
<td>1,017,699</td>
<td>816,754</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,834,453</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>16,502,898</td>
<td>1,196,628</td>
<td>778,768</td>
<td>457,229</td>
<td>2,432,625</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>22,696,831</td>
<td>1,741,946</td>
<td>1,548,634</td>
<td>8,609</td>
<td>3,299,189</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>24,791,963</td>
<td>1,416,672</td>
<td>1,547,190</td>
<td>173,780</td>
<td>3,137,642</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>24,429,761</td>
<td>1,208,364</td>
<td>723,814</td>
<td>396,535</td>
<td>2,328,713</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>21,752,428</td>
<td>953,731</td>
<td>320,206</td>
<td>1,106,758</td>
<td>2,380,695</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>24,181,188</td>
<td>933,144</td>
<td>332,202</td>
<td>302,446</td>
<td>1,567,792</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>26,389,608</td>
<td>1,094,915</td>
<td>307,655</td>
<td>268,165</td>
<td>1,670,735</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>27,039,394</td>
<td>1,106,796</td>
<td>224,140</td>
<td>461,451</td>
<td>1,792,387</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>204,803,717</td>
<td>10,669,895</td>
<td>6,599,363</td>
<td>3,174,973</td>
<td>20,444,231</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A seok is a unit of volume and/or weight (1 seok of unhusked rice = 72 kg).


Note: 1. The years here are fiscal years.

2. Annual tax collections are based on the records of production year.

3. The “Others” category is a total of collection of leased grain, exchanged fertilizers, sales in cash, and advanced sales that have not been accounted for.

posed significant problems to the state’s plans for tax acquisition. Previous studies have often emphasized the Syngman Rhee regime’s exploitation of the rural communities. When the Korean War broke out in the midst of the land reform, the South Korean government demanded temporary taxes on land acquisition, which ranged from 8 to as much as 28 percent. In addition, the state also demanded land repayments in kind, pegged at 30 percent of the total annual yield for five consecutive years. In other words, recipient households had to pay anything from 38 to 58 percent of their total yields to the state. Based on this fact, many studies have argued that the imposition of heavy payments in kind was an important factor behind the exacerbation of farming household finances. They saw this policy as a program of capital accumulation at the farmers’ expense (Yi 1987, 168-78, 204-08; Kim 2002, 308-09). An important point here, however, is that there was a difference between how much the state levied relative to how much the farmers actually paid.

The farmers’ payments in kind (relative to total production) in wartime was recorded as over 10 percent: 14.7 percent in 1952 and 14.8 percent in 1953. The rate was also high in 1954 at 12.7 percent. While the rate certainly was not low, it did not meet what the government exacted in the first place. As for the
temporary land acquisition tax, the rate during wartime was around 6-7 percent of total production. For the nine years between 1951 and 1959, the average rate was around 5.2 percent of total production, which was far lower than the lowest rate of 8 percent imposed on farming households producing less than $5 seok$ a year. While the above-mentioned taxes were to last five years, the state had to continue exacting them into the late 1950s due to delinquencies. The total annual average of agricultural production the state actually collected in the 1950s was around 10 percent. Of course, submitting even 10 percent of total production must have been a significant burden for farming households. It is also important to note that it was the land recipients who bore the brunt of the tax burden. Overall, we can observe a substantial amount of delinquency in tax collection (Kim 2000b, 166-68, 174).

Fearing disaffection from the farmers, the Syngman Rhee regime had limits in the extent they pursued agricultural survluses. The Rhee regime's solution was to introduce agricultural survluses from the United States to lower the prices of agricultural goods in the domestic market, which produced the effect of moving agricultural survluses into the cities.

The farmers' discontent was also expressed in their dealings with the local organizations that carried out the state's agricultural policy. In carrying out its agricultural policy, the South Korean government at the time utilized, due to the limitations of its administrative power in the countryside, proxy organizations such as irrigation and financial associations.

In the case of financial associations, the associations democratized their operations at the national level by accepting the farmers' demands in 1952. Its umbrella organization at the national level elevated the council, which previously functioned as an advisory board, to that of a deliberative organ with real powers. The council now also had the power to appoint the organization's executive board. The democratization of irrigation associations was an epoch-making move that allowed all members of the organization to play a role in the decision-making process. Furthermore, in 1955, the system of indirect elections for selecting council members was changed to one of direct election. However, the overall process of democratization was continuously disrupted by the members' lack of capacity for autonomy and political interventions. In January 1959, the state revoked the autonomy of irrigation associations by allowing provincial governors to make their own appointments. In the end, authoritarian methods of rule returned.

The irrigation associations' scale was also an issue. During the 1950s, irrigation associations all over the country borrowed money from the Industrial Bank in order to fund necessary facilities. The rates ranged from 3.5 to 10.5
percent, and according to the principle of “user pays,” farmers bore the financial burden of those loans (Nongnimbu 1958, 157-60, 181-82). Many irrigation associations, due to their size, had a difficult time handling the loan payments. On the other hand, fearing possible privatization of irrigation associations, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry continued to emphasize the need for irrigation associations to stick to their public mission and democratization (Nongnimbu 1958, 187-88).

Immediately after the April Revolution, a number of protests broke out in the countryside criticizing the state and demanding the democratization of the state agricultural policy. The most representative of such protests were movements for the democratization of irrigation associations. For example, on May 10, 1960 around a hundred irrigation association members in Chungju protested with placards reading: “Give the management rights of irrigation associations back to the farmers,” “Abolish the irrigation association order that exploits the farmers,” and “Away with the irrigation association staff” (Jeong and Gwon, eds. 2010, 233). In October of the same year in Namhae, another protest criticizing the irrigation association authority took place. Similar protests for the democratization of irrigation associations occurred around the country, and a bill for the democratization of irrigation associations was also introduced in the National Assembly (Joseon ilbo, October 7, 1960 and October 31, 1960).

Existing research has argued that South Korean farmers of the 1950s either supported the government or passively went along with the government policies even when they did not support the regime. The widespread farmer discontentment toward the government’s exploitative agricultural policy, however, was surfacing through various means including tax delinquencies. By the time of the April Revolution, such dissatisfaction had developed into protests for democratization as seen in the case of protests for the democratization of irrigation associations. However, lacking organization, such movements were unable to challenge the political culture of authoritarianism.

Conclusion

The South Korean land reform, in its background, legislation, and execution, influenced the fundamental character and structure of South Korean democracy in profound ways. By its basic terms, this reform aimed to prevent socialist revolution and strengthen the country’s anticomunist base by accommodating the demands of farmer revolution from the top. The land reform’s social democratic character was minimized in its legislative process—in which the
principles of confiscation with compensation and distribution with cost prevailed. By confirming the exclusivity of private property and opening up paths for landlords to become industrial capitalists, the South Korean land reform played a critical role in establishing the socioeconomic base for the liberal democratic and capitalist system in South Korea. Furthermore, the National Assembly’s management of the legislative process of land reform and its accommodation of different voices and opinions regarding the land reform’s character and process, also proved a valuable experience for the country’s young procedural democracy. As a result of the land reform, the rural communities also became more equal and saw traditional sources of authority weaken and decline. The fact that farmers, through the reform, were liberated from the landlord system and transformed into independent farmers (albeit on a precariously small scale) was also important in creating a pillar for rural democratization from a long-term perspective.

Despite the aforementioned positive points, the South Korean land reform also had its shortcomings and displayed democratic limitations. The issue of creating cooperative associations, which were deemed to be essential in assuring farmer independence and autonomy, was not even discussed in the process of legislation. The government’s executive branch carried out the execution of the land reform, and landlords and tenants who were directly affected by the land reform were relegated to advisory roles without any real voices. With the path to the development of farmers’ autonomous organizations blocked, the real power in the rural communities at the myeon-level rested with the local administrators and elders. The South Korean countryside of the 1950s was a place where both the formality of democracy and the reality of authoritarianism coexisted. Within such a context, farmers expressed their dissent and distrust toward the South Korean government’s exploitative agricultural policy through methods such as tax delinquencies. Immediately after the April Revolution, some farmers even protested for rural democratization—with irrigation association protests being one of such examples. The course of modern Korean history, however, shows the movement towards rural democratization was ultimately stymied by the May 16 coup.

In sum, the South Korean land reform limited South Korean democracy to the framework of anticommunism and liberal democracy in the context of a global Cold War, while providing for an experience in procedural democracy for a young legislature and at least the structural conditions for rural democratization. In other words, the South Korean land reform did not result in the establishment of democracy. Such characteristics are not unrelated to the conditions of South Korean democracy today. Despite the great stability of the
anticommunist and liberal democratic system, as well as the obtainment of a high level of procedural democracy, democracy in South Korea has been criticized for its relative lack of substance. Such characteristics are already evident during the period of the South Korean land reform of the 1950s.

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