

## STATE FORMATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY UNDER AMERICAN OCCUPATION: THE CASE OF SOUTH KOREA\*

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*It is basic to examine the historical background in order to understand the social and political changes of contemporary Korea in connection with the origin of Korea's strong state. Focusing on the specific role of the US military government, the main purpose of this paper is to examine the social and political changes of South Korea under American occupation after the end of World War II. What were the characteristics of state formation under American occupation? What could account for this particular pattern and evolution? For which direction was the civil society of Korea heading? What was responsible for the demobilization or reshaping of the civil society? How was the relationship between the state and civil society shaped? What kind of impact did it have on later Korean society? Answering these questions, this paper relates these issues with the historical origin of the strong or authoritarian state in Korea.*

### INTRODUCTION

There is no question that the state had a very significant role in the rapid industrialization of Korea, although there are different interpretations about the remarkable changes in Korea led by the state. However, it does not lead us to accept the view that the Korean society was so passive and docile that it was always managed by the strong state. As a matter of fact, the social changes in modern Korean history can be explained well by the complex and dynamic relationship between the state and civil society. It seems that recent attention to the state and civil society in Korea is a recognition of their dialectic relationship (Korean Sociological Association and Korean Political Association 1992; Koo 1993). Nonetheless, little attention was given to the historical origin of the strong state and civil society in Korea. Most research tends to show ahistorical positions by considering the role of the Korean state and society since 1960 to be natural.

This paper is written to show that it is basic to examine the historical background in order to understand the social and political changes of

\*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the roundtable discussion at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association in New York, August 19, 1996. I appreciate the valuable comments and suggestions of anonymous reviewers of the Korea Journal of Population and Development. This paper was supported by Gyeongsang National University fund for research year, 1996.

contemporary Korea in connection with the origin of Korea's strong state. Certainly, the origin of a strong state in Korea is related to the traditional centralized state of the Yi Dynasty and the experience of Japanese colonial rule (Cumings 1984; Eckert 1991; Park 1991; Shin 1996). While I am not overlooking those historical legacies, specifically, in this paper, I am going to deal with the period of American occupation (1945-1948) which, although it was not long, played a crucial role in shaping the later course of Korean history.

Various studies have been conducted about this American occupation period. However, these previous studies paid much attention to the process of division of Korea or the origin of the Korean war. So, these studies left out the outcomes which the American occupation produced, and its impacts on the later relationship between the Korean state and civil society.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, their approaches were mainly focused on US general foreign policy towards Korea, and the internal conflicts among political groups or social classes in Korea. As a result, these studies tended to neglect the concrete role of the US military government, which controlled Korean society by its occupation. And its specific occupation policies in relation to reshaping of civil society was left unexplored.

Focusing on the specific role of the US military government, the main purpose of this paper is to examine the social and political changes of South Korea under American occupation after the end of World War II. Finally, I will relate my conclusions to the resultant emergence of the authoritarian state in later Korean history.

## APPROACH AND SCOPE

Since South Korea was occupied and governed directly by the US military government after the liberation from Japanese rule at the end of World War II, the period of American occupation in Korea had distinctive sociopolitical characteristics of a power structure conducted by foreign military force. The state power of the US military government was not a product of endogenous development in Korean society, but it was just a transplantation from outside. While occupation power generally supports certain domestic groups, it also takes advantage of them in order to realize its own national interests, because it is transitional power compared to colonial power. Therefore, we must note the role of the US military government in

<sup>1</sup> There are a few previous studies about the state formation in Korea and impact of American occupation (Song 1989; Chun 1991; Park 1995).

understanding the social and political changes in Korea during the American occupation period.

However, it does not mean that the changes in Korean society were created only by outside US military forces. Actually, many Koreans were eager to take part in diverse social and political activities to build an independent Korean state and to shape a new social order at that time. Although structural changes in the occupation period were brought about by strong influences of the US occupation power, the way to realize its specific goal was also influenced by internal social conditions.

Thus, I am not interested in raising the alternative question about the relative importance of external and internal factors in the social changes of Korea under American occupation. On a general level, it is obvious that social changes during that time were much influenced by the US, which had its own national interests toward Korea. However, on a specific level, social changes were not realized in one direction. This means that it is important to look at how external and internal factors interacted, and how that relationship was structured (Koo 1987).

With regard to the origin of the strong or authoritarian state in Korea, I am going to consider not only the state but also civil society. There are different theoretical points of view about the concepts of the state and civil society, and their relationship. But in this paper, state is conceptualized as a central power structure which has its own interests (Skocpol 1985, pp. 3-37). Civil society is conceptualized as the areas of social life-the domestic world, the economic sphere, cultural activities and political interaction-which are organized by private or voluntary arrangements between individuals and groups outside the direct control of state (Held 1989, p. 181). By looking at both the state and civil society rather than taking their fixed and unilateral relationship, this approach is useful to comprehend the origin of the strong or authoritarian state in Korea.<sup>2</sup>

As a transitional period for building the independent Korean government, there was no clear separation between state and civil society during the US occupation period in Korea. However, the state formation under American occupation was not made without any state power. On the one hand, holding state power with the influence of the Japanese colonial power (Cumings 1984; Shin 1996), outside US military forces were transplanted as the US military government in Korea (USMGIK) and came to have a key role in managing the state formation and shaping Korean

<sup>2</sup> In this approach, the state strength is neither absolute nor fixed, but rather varies significantly from one sector to another, from one issue to another, from one time to another.

society. On the other hand, after the defeat of Japan, Korean civil society exploded with various social and political activities to create an independent state and new social order. It was also in that period that Korea came to have not only the division of legislative, administrative and judicial powers of government as formal institutions, but also political rights, such as universal suffrage for the first time. Therefore, the state and civil society approach can be applied in order to understand social transformation as a whole during the American occupation, through which the basic relationship between the state and civil society in contemporary Korea was determined. In this approach, the nature of the strong state in Korea is examined in terms of the relationship or interactions between state and civil society. In this regard, the major questions and the specific areas I am presenting in my paper are as follows:

1. What were the characteristics of state formation under American occupation? What could account for this particular pattern and evolvement? Answering these questions, I will look at the conflicts among political groups and also look at how the state apparatuses were formed in connection with its role of USMGIK. Finally, I will examine how a certain group such as the Korean Democratic Party (KDP) came into a dominant position.

2. In which direction was the civil society of Korea heading? What was responsible for the demobilization or reshaping of the civil society? I will deal with these questions with regard to the occupation policy of USMGIK.

3. How was the relationship between the state and civil society shaped? What kind of impact did it have on later Korean society? I will relate these issues with the historical origin of the strong or authoritarian state in Korea.

#### BUILDING OF US MILITARY GOVERNMENT IN KOREA AND THE OCCUPATION POLICY

With the end of Japanese colonial rule on August 15, 1945, the civil society in Korea exploded with high hopes for creating an independent state and a new social order. There were widespread social and political mobilizations throughout the country. Koreans differed, however, in their visions of post-colonial state and society. Without the two foreign external powers of the USSR and the USA, the destiny of Korean society would be determined by its own internal power struggles. But Korea had come to be divided under two great super powers. By occupying and governing the southern zone of the 38th parallel, the USMGIK became the most important agent to change the situation in Korea.<sup>3</sup>

The main objective of the US was to establish the anti-communist state and to maintain the capitalist system in Korea. Even though USMGIK had not formally announced the anti-communist line, it adopted a strong anti-communist policy and put emphasis on social stability in order to maintain the existing social order. Measures were taken to debilitate the nationalist forces on the left and even on the right. Any claims of fundamental change were considered to be dangerous things which threatened the position of the US.

Let me briefly explain the resources of USMGIK's state power. Holding state apparatuses such as bureaucracy, police and military forces, USMGIK governed Korean society in accordance with its purposes. In terms of the state capacity<sup>4</sup> of USMGIK, however, both administrative capacity through organizations and extractive capacity through taxation were weak. So, coercive resources such as polices and military forces became more important. The other way to compensate for the weakness of extractive capacity was to get hold of material resources such as vested property and foreign aid.

As I mentioned earlier, the state power during the American occupation was a transplanted foreign power which tried to put Korean society under the influence of its national interests (Krasner 1978).<sup>5</sup> The occupation policy of USMGIK was a reflection and a realization of its purposes. The major economic policies, such as disposal of vested property and land reform were also associated with the goal of the US (Lee 1992). In this chapter, I am going to mention economic policy briefly before dealing with the policy regarding state formation in the next.

As we know, former Japanese property was vested and managed by USMGIK.<sup>6</sup> Actually, the US was quite aware that the vested property was the significant material base for capitalist system. The US also recognized that the vested property must be held until the Korea government, which would guarantee US's interests, emerged (U.S. Department of State, p. 307). Since the disposal of vested property was related to the formation of the ruling class, there were many conflicts and debates about those issues. By possessing the vested property, USMGIK dominated Korean civil society. The New Korean Company, which managed 15.3 percent of the total

<sup>3</sup> For the internal power structure, see Hoag 1970.

<sup>4</sup> State capacity, according to T. Skocpol, is the means to implement official goals, especially over the actual or potential opposition of powerful social groups or in the face of recalcitrant socioeconomic circumstances (Skocpol 1985).

<sup>5</sup> For US foreign policy in relation to its national interest, see Krasner 1978.

<sup>6</sup> For the disposal of vested property, see Kim 1990 and Lee 1995.

cultivated lands as vested land and undertook about 1/3 of rice collection (Mitchell 1949, Preface v), played a meaningful role in making up for the administrative weakness of USMGIK.

At the end of the occupation, USMGIK began to sell vested property. Its aim was to form the capitalist classes who would be expected to support the capitalist system. Notwithstanding most Koreans' strong tendency towards nationalization of vested property (Lee 1995, p. 165), USMGIK pushed to sell vested property in order to assure capitalist economic order by making the precedent of its disposal. Since a small amount of vested property was sold, most of it was left to the Korean government which would have the right of its disposal later.

In addition, the US considered land reform to be a substantial means to promote anti-communism (Bredo 1986, pp. 277-290).<sup>7</sup> By the selling of vested land, the US hoped to incorporate Korean peasants into the capitalist system (Mitchell 1952, p. 15; Reed 1975; Olson 1974). The US also emphasized economic aid to maintain social stability in the capitalist system. Since the US was supposed to withdraw from Korea, it could not continue military intervention. Therefore, the US tried to keep its hegemony in Korea through indirect control after the withdrawal.

## PROCESS OF STATE FORMATION

### *Formation of the Ruling Group and Establishment of a Separate Southern Government*

Throughout the American occupation, people got involved in many kinds of spontaneous organizations and various social activities. There were diverse political groups which showed different ideologies and opinions in forming a new social and political order in Korea. In a sense, those variations were based upon their different activities during Japanese colonial rule, their support groups or classes, and the relationship with USMGIK.

At first, there was Choson Konkuk Chunbi Wiwonhoe (Committee for the Preparation of Korea's Independence) led by Un-hyoung Yeo. Just before America arrived in Korea, it adopted the title of "the Korean People's Republic" (KPR) as a Korean government along with the People's Committees which were organized throughout the country (Hong 1985, pp.

<sup>7</sup> William Bredo shows that during the occupation period in Japan, Taiwan, and Korea, US land reform initiatives were to remove the communist threat and to establish the basis for stability of capitalism.

57-103). Without foreign intervention, the KPR and the organizations it sponsored would have triumphed. In the meantime, the KDP, encouraged with the news that America would come to Korea, was organized. That party, which remained the strongest single rightist one, consisted of large landowners and wealthy businessmen (Sim 1982).

Popular massive participation in the building of a new social order made the Korean situation revolutionary (Cumings 1981).<sup>8</sup> Under this circumstance, conservatives and rightist parties could not be in a hegemonic position. As a matter of fact, the KPR had a crucial role as a pseudo-government (McCune 1946, p. 136). Though the US built the military government formally and denied any organizations as government, spontaneous groups gathered on the KPR. This was the beginning of conflict between both powers.

Since the US did not have any internal base in Korea, it needed a Korean political group to make their goal come into effect. It was natural that the group was expected to be conservative and to have anti-communist attitudes. This was the reason why USMGIK recognized and supported the KDP which had been advocating the capitalist system. The alliance between USMGIK and KDP was possible due to their common ideologies regarding capitalism. Being supported by USMGIK and collaborated by Syngman Rhee<sup>9</sup>, the KDP, which could not have any legitimacy just after the liberation, came about and remained in powerful position. Main leaders of KDP had a close relationship with USMGIK. Not only in the administrative organizations, but also in the police and the military forces, could we easily find members of the KDP.

The KDP leaders came to control key elements of the bureaucracy, Byong-ok Cho, director of the Korean National Police; Taek-sang Chang, chief of the Seoul Metropolitan Police; Yong-mu Kim, chief Justice of the Supreme Court; and In Yi, chief Prosecutor. These four men held their positions until 1948 and became dominant figures in suppressing the revolutionary nationalists in South Korea. In addition to these central agencies of law and order, the KDP also held the position of head in other key organizations: the Departments of Agriculture, Communications, Education, Justice, and

<sup>8</sup> According to Charles Tilly, in revolutionary situation, previously acquiescent members of that population find themselves confronted with strictly incompatible demands from the government and form an alternative body. This describes well the Korean situation just after liberation from Japanese colonial rule (Tilly 1978, p. 192).

<sup>9</sup> Syngman Rhee, who fought for Korean Independence through diplomatic effort to western countries and had orientation towards America, needed to collaborate with KDP because he had no organizational ground in Korea.

Public Health; seven bureaus in the Judiciary Department; eight bureaus and sections in the Police Department; bureaus of Foreign affairs, Price Administration, and Personnel. The KDP had influence not only in the Seoul Bureaucracy, but also in the provinces and counties (Sim 1984).

With the support of these bureaucrats in the USMGIK, the KDP elevated itself from a weak political group to the dominant party, helping the USMGIK suppress its political rival, the KPR. The KPR was forced to transform from a de facto Korean government into several political parties and finally to abolish itself. In other words, the KDP and Rhee, who were not in the hegemonic position just after the liberation in Korea eventually became the dominant ruling group by monopolizing administrative bureaucracy and oppressive state apparatuses. The ruling group controlled not only oppressive state apparatuses, but also ideological state apparatuses, such as publications and schools. In order to get an economic base, they became involved in the selling of vested property (Chin 1992, pp. 135-136).

After the "Moscow Agreement"<sup>10</sup> was announced, the idea of trusteeship became a controversial issue between left and right sides. By criticizing communists who supported the trusteeship as anti-nationalists, the KDP and Rhee came to have an advantage over the other political groups. Furthermore, USMGIK continued to oppress the leftist groups (McCune 1950, pp. 84-88).<sup>11</sup> This was a simultaneous process in that USMGIK was getting more autonomy on the one hand and the conservative Korean groups, which were supported by USMGIK, were consolidating their position on the other.

In 1947, the failure of the Joint American-Soviet Commission caused the US to suggest a Korean election under the supervision of the UN that would lead to the establishment of a separate southern government. Rhee had been pursuing the same line since 1946. It was easy for the KDP and Rhee to reach an agreement to support the position of the US about the Korean election. In the meantime, leftist political groups, which had been asking for fundamental changes, organized Namchoso Nodongdang (the Southern Korean Worker's Party) and fought against the USMGIK. Many people got involved in various activities to oppose the election for the

<sup>10</sup> Representatives of the Soviet Union, the United States and Great Britain met in Moscow in December, 1945. It was agreed there that Korea was to endure military occupation for one year, followed by five years of civilian trusteeship. To assist in the formation of a provisional government, the Soviet and American military commands in Korea were instructed to establish a joint commission which, in consultation with democratic Korean organizations, was to make recommendations to the Four Powers.

<sup>11</sup> This leftist political group was led by Hun-yong Park group which had organizational linkage with farmers and workers.

establishment of a separate government. Byong-ok Cho later reported that between February 7 and May 25, 1948, more than eight thousand instances of resistance took place, including 44 strikes and 244 demonstrations (McCune 1950, p. 64). Under direct oppression, however, it was very hard for the leaders of leftist groups to control the potentiality of the people.

On May 10, 1948, although there was much opposition by leftist groups as well as nationalist groups led by Ku Kim,<sup>12</sup> Rhee and the KDP won the election. The first direct universal election in Korean history was to make a separate southern government. The process of grasping power for the KDP and Rhee was at the same time the process of exclusion for other political groups. In alliance with USMGIK, the KDP and Rhee became the ruling party, whereas many other groups such as peasants, workers, leftist groups and also some nationalists were oppressed and excluded.

In the eye of the US, the policy to make a bulwark as an anti-communist capitalist state in Korea was certainly successful. However, in the eye of Korea, the separated Korean government which had a lack of legitimacy was established.<sup>13</sup> In addition, it also meant that South Korea came into a dependent condition under the influence of US.

### *The Formation of State Apparatuses*

With the legacy of Japanese colonial rule, state formation of the post-colonial state was usually given colonial influence. Korea also had a formidable state apparatus which was the residue of Japanese colonial rule. Success of the occupation power's goal depends upon the control of the state apparatuses. The Americans sought a state that would possess a means of coercion sufficient to maintain political stability and the existing social order, and prevent an orientation of South Korea away from American interest.

At the end of 1945, the American occupation and its Korean allies built or reinforced a bureaucratic police and military force. Those were organizational and coercive resources to reshape Korean society, where people were pursuing fundamental changes. In other words, the occupation power made critical choices regarding the formation of state apparatuses that brought about the conditions in which the rightist conservatives would emerge triumphant more than two years later. It was possible through those

<sup>12</sup> Ku Kim group, which made Korean Provisional Government in China in order to fight for Korean Independence, was against trusteeship and the separate election.

<sup>13</sup> The legitimacy of the First Republic in Korea was fragile because the power of the South Korean state was perceived as deriving from its American benefactor (Choi 1993, p. 21).

apparatuses to realize the occupation policy toward Korea, namely, to put South Korea under the influence of the US. It is important to explore the structure of the state apparatuses in detail, since it determined the power structure of the Korean government later.

### 1. Administrative Organization

Korean society was dominated directly by the USMGIK. Though the Southern Korean Interim Government had been working formally since June 3, 1947, the real power was still in the hands of USMGIK. Considering the KPR to be illegal, the initial American response in terms of organizations was the attempt not only to revive the colonial apparatus itself but also to utilize hatred of Japanese officials from the highest levels to down (Cumings 1981, pp. 135-158). Being criticized by Korean people, it was replaced by USMGIK. In a sense, that was the process of making an organizational base to support the policy of USMGIK.

Let us look at how the bureaucracy was strengthened. The Americans began to reorganize Japanese colonial bureaucratic structure and increased the number of bureaucratic organizations that had been in the colonial bureaucracy in South Korea in order to meet the increased requisites of control in the highly mobilized political setting. There were thirteen departments and seven offices in May 1947. The number of government civil service employees increased from about 75,000 at the end of 1945 to 150,441 in May 1947. In addition to these employees, there are also about 122,000 vested company employees.<sup>14</sup>

It was even a more centralized organizational structure than in the Japanese colonial period (Kim 1992, pp. 252-258, p. 289). In sum, the characteristics of state apparatuses in terms of organizations during the American occupation were a centralization and an overdevelopment of state power. However, the organizational base of USMGIK was not enough to control Korean civil society, due to its weak administrative capacity.

### 2. Police and National Defense Forces

The main tools of USMGIK in controlling Korean society were the coercive resources such as police and military forces. The important function of the Korean National Police (KNP) was a political one, and the main reason that the USMGIK retained the Japanese colonial police system

<sup>14</sup> The numbers of Provincial Government employees are 92,485 and the numbers of employees in National Government departments and offices are 57,956. (United States Army Forces in Korea 1948, January, pp. 167-168).

and its Korean personnel was to fight against the KPR and the People's Committees, considering them as communist forces. At the time of Japanese surrender, about 40 percent of the Japanese colonial police forces were Korean, and by September 1947, about 80 percent of the former colonial Korean policemen were reemployed by the USMGIK (An 1987, p. 201). The number of policemen increased rapidly, demonstrating the need for social control in the revolutionary situation of decolonized South Korea.

With the highly centralized organization and widely extended functions, the KNP became an important instrument for the USMGIK to achieve its goal of building a bulwark against communism. The superior organizational and technical resources of the KNP was the prime factor in the demise of the revolutionary KPR and the People's Committees. As a large and cohesive organization on a national level, KNP took charge of the key role in rice collection and in oppressing leftist groups. It was one of the most coercive resources of state power to guarantee the goal of USMGIK. It was also the most effective means to control society.

In October 1945, America decided to establish Korean military forces that could serve an auxiliary and back-up resources for the KNP (Cumings 1981, p. 169). The development of national defense forces was also one of the occupation power's responses to the revolutionary conditions in South Korea. In November, less than a year after the military program had begun operation, the Korean Constabulary numbered about 6,000 men. By the summer of 1948, just before the birth of the Republic of Korea, the total of the South Korean constabulary exceeded 50,000 men, including a small contingent of the Coast Guard (Kim 1985, p. 162).

## THE NATURE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

### *From Explosion to Decline of Civil Society*

The social structure under American occupation is different from the Western European civil society, which is characterized by industrialization along with expansion of the free market, division of labor, the emergence of the bourgeoisie as a new class, its pursuit of common interest based upon solidarity, and the activities in voluntary organizations. In the case of western European civil society, the formation of civil society came with the emergence of the bourgeoisie who resisted the traditional social structure as well as the feudal ruling class. The bourgeoisie was the class which expressed civil consciousness. The growth of civil society was a process of establishment of the modern representative system on the one hand, and the

development of the nation-state on the other. Modern civil consciousness based upon the representative system and nationalism broke down the absolutism and formed the new relationship between the modern nation-state and civil society. Compared to the situation of western society, the nature of civil society in Korea under American occupation was certainly different.

During the American occupation, the Korean bourgeoisie was not yet fully developed. The intergration between state and civil society based upon bourgeois democracy as a new ideology was executed by the influence of transplanted US military power. Thus, there was a serious gap between state and civil society. However, as I mentioned earlier, if I can say that civil society is conceptualized as the areas of social life which are organized by private or voluntary arrangements between individuals and groups outside the direct control of state, I can apply the term of civil society to understand the Korean situation. The civil society in Korea exploded just after liberation because of the protest experience during the Japanese colonial rule<sup>15</sup> and the unstable state power. Since that was a revolutionary period, the explosion of civil society was expressed by many social and political organizations. Before October 24, 1945, 54 political parties were registered with the military government. Within a year, it increased to 300 (Henderson 1968, p. 131). In addition, within 2 months, many People's Committees were organized throughout the country (Cumings 1981, chap. 8). While the traditional ruling class, the landowners, did not have legitimacy in post-colonial Korea due to their collaborations with the Japanese, Korean bourgeoisie as a new ruling class was not yet developed. However, the oppressed classes such as peasants, workers and the middle class showed the civil attitude and political consciousness in changing Korean society. The civil society did not consist of the bourgeois class, as in the Western society. Rather, it consisted of workers and peasants who tried to overcome the existing social structure.

The expression and orientation of civil society can be explained by the rise of many voluntary associations. The nature of voluntary associations in terms of ideology tended to show a left-oriented attitude (Chin 1992, p. 144). The peasants and workers associated with the leftist political sides especially asked for fundamental changes. They got involved in numerous social and political activities to realize their goal of making a new social and

<sup>15</sup> Gi-wook Shin shows colonial experience in protest and resistance provided postwar activism a crucial resource, that is, enhanced consciousness, which People's Committee then mobilized for the uprisings by organizing protests (Shin 1994).

political order. Workers participated in self-management movement and diverse strikes. The peasants participated in the management and distribution of former Japanese lands. They also asked for land reform.<sup>16</sup> Because they had the protest experience of class struggle during the Japanese colonial rule, they came to have a strong class consciousness (Shin 1994, pp. 1596-1624). So, they made a national organization for workers and peasants. Within 3 months after liberation, the members of Chonnong, the peasant's national organization, numbered 3,322,937, with unions in 188 counties, 1,745 districts, and 25,288 villages (Democratic National Front 1946 p. 16).<sup>17</sup>

Especially, in the fall of 1946, the Korean peasants and workers sought to reverse the effects of a year of American occupation, and their uprisings swept throughout the whole southern Korean provinces for three months. The people's opposition to the USMGIK was strongest in the Kyeongsang and Cholla provinces, which had powerful People's Committees. Through the uprising the Koreans expressed their strong discontent over American rule, and brought into focus the failures of the USMGIK's political and economic policies (Chung 1988). It was really the expression of strong activation of civil society. As a matter of fact, the nature of civil society can be explained by concrete Korean demands, such as the formation of the nation state, democracy and the realization of social reform. However, as a result of the USMGIK's violent suppression of the uprising, the People's Committees and the organizations associated with them were almost totally destroyed, and the reactionary Korean groups, particularly the KNP, became the dominant forces in the provinces. Consequently, the massive explosion of civil society was rapidly weakened.

### *The Reorganization and Institutionalization of Civil Society*

As I mentioned earlier, USMGIK hoped to form a political group in order to maintain the existing social order in accordance with US national interest towards Korea. They also hoped to make a social class to take charge of the dominant role in the capitalist society. The selling of vested industry was the means to form an agent who was supposed to have a key role in making capitalist society and an anti-communist state. The formation and the

<sup>16</sup> Chonnong, the peasants's national organization, called for fundamental land reform such as redistribution of land to tenant farmers without compensating the landowners. However, the US military government, and the Korean rightists, either insisted on a very moderate land reform program or opposed land reform.

<sup>17</sup> Although perhaps exaggerated, these figures suggest that on the average, one person per peasant household joined the unions.

growth of the capitalist class was guaranteed by the state, whereas, the working class, who tried to get involved in the self-management movement, was excluded from the selling of vested property. In addition, land reform had the effect of the collapse of landowners, the traditional ruling class. The USMGIK also destroyed the organization of the peasant's social movement.

After all, the class structure in Korea was reshaped through the policy of USMGIK. While the peasants, workers and leftist political groups were excluded and landowners collapsed, the capitalist class as a new ruling class emerged. However, the capitalist class was not in a hegemonic position because they were not developed yet. This was the process of forming the autonomous state, which made the imbalance between state and civil society. The balance of power between state and civil society shifted irrevocably in favor of the former; now a highly developed central bureaucratic state stood above civil society, which no longer possessed powerful social classes or social organizations.

Of course, the USMGIK introduced a procedure of democracy on the surface to Koreans, and helped them to make the Korean constitution, which copied many of the democratic principles of the United States constitution (Hong 1986).<sup>18</sup> The USMGIK also helped Koreans establish a representative congress whose members were elected by a general election and a government whose chief was elected by the people. Yet, compared to the growth of western civil society, the institutionalization of Korean civil society was not made by themselves, rather it was made under the influence of the US military government. Besides, if a democracy means, at the least, that the government is supported by the majority of the people, and that the people can freely participate in political activities and express their opinions, and be treated equally by the laws, there was much limitation.<sup>19</sup> We have seen how strongly the majority of Koreans opposed the USMGIK through the general strikes and the October (Chung 1988) and Cheju uprisings.<sup>20</sup>

In the case of western society, the emergence of the bourgeois itself means

<sup>18</sup> Even though the Korean constitution was influenced by U.S. constitution, this does not mean that one absolutely copied the other. There are some articles which reflected the people's revolutionary demands in Korea (Hong 1986, pp. 118-127).

<sup>19</sup> For the institutionalization of liberal democracy and its limitation, see Park 1995, pp. 318-371.

<sup>20</sup> Cheju is the biggest island in Korea, off the southern tip of the mainland. On April 3, the series of outrages committed by the corrupt officials and the announcement of the separate election culminated in an armed uprising by the people. Although the USMGIK hastily dispatched the constabulary, the fighters effectively continued the struggle for months (Merrill 1982).

the formation of civil society. The bourgeois as a new class resisted the traditional social structure and expressed the civil consciousness. However, in the case of Korea, the traditional bureaucratic structure remained and was reinforced by the support of USMGIK. The oppressed classes, who expressed themselves in civil and political consciousness, had troubles realizing their interests because of the USMGIK's continuous outright suppression.

## CONCLUSION

The state formation under American occupation was characterized by the fact that the state power was not a reflection of the internal power struggles in Korean society. Rather, it was transplanted power from the outside which determined the civil society. This means the transplanted state power played a key role in building a Korean state and in reshaping civil society. The nature of USMGIK was shown by the US general foreign policy in building an anti-communist state and maintaining a capitalist system in Korea. By controlling the administrative organizations as well as the coercive and material resources, USMGIK was the important agent in executing the policies and in changing the relationships among political groups. The state power with its occupation policy, strongly influenced the changing of their relationships within Korean civil society.

The main alliances of USMGIK were landowners, pro-Japanese Koreans and conservative rightist intellectuals. The peasants, workers, leftist political groups and even some nationalists were excluded in the beginning of Korean state-formation. Throughout the American occupation, the people's spontaneous efforts for state formation were suppressed. The KDP, some of whom were pro-Japanese, and the rightist Rhee became the ruling party. The USMGIK constructed autonomous state apparatuses to control civil society by reinforcing Japanese bureaucratic organizations and making the oppressive state apparatuses such as military force and the police.

The American occupation period was the beginning stage of civil society. However, the explosion of civil society weakened in the collapse of civil society through the American occupation policy. It was different from western civil society. While the ruling class in Korea had no hegemony, the workers and peasants who showed strong activation were suppressed. Of course, Koreans came to have the institutional and formal framework as a civil society throughout American occupation. However, the formation of civil society was distorted by the intervention of external factors. The process of reversal from explosion to decline made it difficult to establish

the institutional stabilization in later Korea.

The state was strong because even though it lacked hegemony, it had centralized bureaucratic organization, coercive apparatuses and allocative resources to suppress emerging social forces that were principally responsible for activating civil society. But society was weak as a result of the occupation policies and the execution of repressive state power. This demobilization of civil society had little to do with the internal dynamics of South Korean society, rather, it must be attributed to USMGIK's policy and the substantial means used to achieve its objectives.

The overdeveloped and centralized bureaucratic organizations, the coercive and material base of the state, the exclusion of oppressed classes, and the absence of hegemony in the ruling classes made the Korean state autonomous, whereas, the civil society became feeble. That is to say, the state and society became alienated from each other. Even though the conservative political groups, which lacked the legitimacy, became a ruling party, their influences over society became strong. Accordingly, Korea came to have the sociopolitical conditions vulnerable to the rise of an authoritarian state through the American occupation. This allows me to argue that the strong state over civil society in contemporary Korea was closely associated with the historical experience during the American occupation.

Finally, let me finish my paper by mentioning the theoretical implication. Neither a state-centered nor a society-centered approach is appropriate in order to explain the origin of the authoritarian state in Korea. Rather, it can be explained with regard to the relationship between state and civil society reshaped under American occupation.

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