

The Korean Presidential Election in December 1997

*Kim Dae-jung's Victory as a Momentum for Democratic Consolidation**

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I. Introduction

South Korea held the cleanest and fairest presidential election ever in its history on December 18, 1997. It was a momentous event in which the peaceful transfer of power to the opposition took place for the first time.

By winning this election, Kim Dae-jung reached the climax of his dramatic political life in his seventies. In the authoritarian era, he suffered from long years of harsh treatment, such as assassination attempts, kidnapping, exile, imprisonment, and house arrest. Even after democratic transition, his political career was by no means smooth sailing. He was vulnerable to his opponents' attempts to paint him black by invoking his old image as a radical or leftist sympathizer. Electoral defeat in the 1992 presidential election led him to retire from politics. When he made political comeback two and a half years afterwards, he fell under criticism by those who regarded him as blinded by his greed for power. Due to the egregious prevalence of regional antipathy, he hardly stretched his electoral support base beyond Honam voters. After his own revelation of receiving money from President

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Roh's slush funds, he was often blamed for having engaged in the corrupt old-style politicking. During the 1997 presidential campaign, he was even troubled by the allegations of ill health. After all, however, Kim Dae-jung surmounted these tremendous liabilities and weaknesses, having a final triumph in his fourth presidential bid.

A total of seven candidates vied for the single five-year-term presidency. Most media coverage and the voters as well focused on three major candidates, including Lee Hoi-chang of the Grand National Party(GNP, formerly NKP — New Korea Party), Kim Dae-jung of the National Congress for New Politics(NCNP), and Rhee In-je of the New Party by the People(NPP). When the official campaign began on November 26, the competition further shaped up into a two-way race between two front runners, Lee and Kim.

The purpose of this essay is to systematically investigate how and why the 1997 presidential election brought forth Kim Dae-jung's victory and the first transfer of power through election. Specifically, the electoral context is discussed, with the division of the ruling party being a focus. Candidates' campaign styles, and in particular, Kim's winning strategies are examined. Voters' candidate choice is explained based on the aggregate election results and also on the individual survey data. Finally, the general political implications of the outcome are explored.

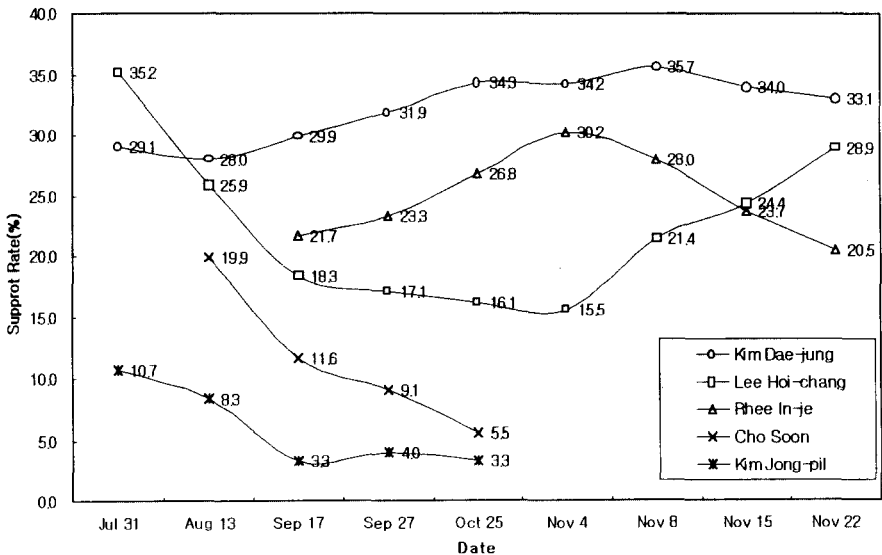
II. Divided Ruling Camp

The serious dissension within the ruling NKP over its presidential nominee is a natural point of departure for explaining Kim Dae-jung's electoral success. One may reasonably think that Kim would have faced a much tougher race without a third-party major candidate originating from the ruling party. The strife within the ruling party put Kim into a strategically favorable position which enabled him to play off two other major contenders against each another.

Lee Hoi-chang, widely known as Mr. Clean, 62 years of age, was chosen as the

ruling party's presidential candidate in the nomination convention held on July 21. Around that time, Lee enjoyed a high level of popularity, unrivaled by any presidential hopeful, including Kim Dae-jung. The outcome of the coming presidential election appeared to be a foregone conclusion.

But Lee's popularity soon turned out to be fragile. After Lee's nomination, Kim's NCNP raised allegations that Lee's two sons intentionally reduced weight to avoid military conscription. Lee and his party continually but vainly denied the allegation. Many voters perceived that Lee might have played a role for his sons' evading military service. They began to question if Lee would be eligible as the commander-in-chief, and if he would truly carry out promised reform when elected. He became even considered as a privileged man standing aloof from ordinary people's life. All of a sudden, Lee's image as an uncorrupt leader shattered. Lee's popularity nose-dived, and became lower than Kim's popularity from mid-August on(See <Figure 1>).



Note: Nonresponse and don't know categories have been excluded.

Source: Gallup Korea: *Chosun Ilbo*, August 1, September 30, October 28, and November 25, 1997.

<Figure 1> Support Rates for Presidential Candidates

Within the ruling party, Lee's opponents, mostly in the Minju faction loyal to President Kim Young-sam, questioned Lee's chances of winning. They began to demand Lee's resignation from the candidacy. This induced Rhee In-je, the runner-up in the nomination race, to break his promise of respecting the verdict of party convention and to declare his candidacy in mid-September. Rhee, the former governor of Kyonggi Province, stood for the presidential election as the youngest(49 years old) contender.

To stop the free fall of Lee's popularity, the NKP attempted to make a counterattack on Kim Dae-jung. In mid-October, the party filed with the prosecution a complaint against Kim for corruption charges. Kim allegedly took 13.5 billion won in bribes from businessmen between 1991 and 1993, and managed slush funds. If confirmed, this could have dealt a serious blow to Kim. When former President Roh was arrested on corruption charges in late 1995, Kim himself revealed that he received 2 billion won from Ex-President Roh during the 1992 presidential election. However, apart from this, Kim kept denying the illegal collection of money from any other source. In less than a week, the prosecutor-general announced the suspension of its probe into Kim's slush fund scandal until after the election. The prosecution head justified this action by saying that the probe, if launched just two months prior to the election, would lead the country into serious turmoil. As a result, the allegation by the ruling NKP did not work at all to enhance its candidate's popularity(*Korea Herald*, October 22, 1997).

It was apparently President Kim Young-sam who was behind the decision to suspend investigation into Kim Dae-jung's slush fund. In response to the prosecution's decision, Lee demanded President Kim Young-sam to resign from the NKP. Lee also called for the investigation of President Kim's 1992 campaign funds as well as Kim Dae-jung's slush funds(*Korea Herald*, October 23, 1997). Lee and his aides thought that the president was pulling the strings to dump Lee and assist Rhee In-je's presidential campaign. Lee intended to resist pressure from his rivals within the ruling party and to boost his reformist image by setting himself apart from old-fashioned political practices. But Lee's action merely threw the ruling party

into further disunity. President Kim immediately refused to leave the party. Lee's opponents in the party, mostly loyal to the president, blasted Lee for betraying the president. The relationship between President Kim and Lee soured, which was obviously an encouraging factor for Rhee In-je(*Korea Herald*, October 28 and 29, 1997).

As shown in <Figure 1>, Rhee In-je continued to narrow the popularity gap with front runner Kim Dae-jung within a 5-percent range until early November when his party launched officially. According to the Gallup Korea poll conducted on November 4, Kim was the most popular with a rate of 34.2%, and he was closely followed by Rhee(30.2%). Lee was far outdistanced(15.5%). Since then Rhee and his NPP invited increasingly intense attack from the rival candidates and parties. Both the NKP and the NCNP dismissed Rhee's party as President Kim's new party. By associating Rhee with unpopular President Kim, the two large parties tried to abort Rhee's presidential bid. The NCNP went further to allege that President Kim provided funds for Rhee's party. These allegations were made based on unconfirmed rumors. Still, Rhee had a real difficulty escaping the tag of "New YS party," given that Rhee's supporters were mainly the president's followers(*Korea Herald*, November 6 and 7, 1997). As indicated by <Figure 1>, Rhee was indeed so vulnerable to these accusations that his popularity began to decline after its peak in early November.

No decisive evidence showed that President Kim Young-sam himself was committed to Rhee and provided him with direct assistance. When the NKP was embroiled in internal fighting between pro-Lee and anti-Lee forces, the president did not intervene to arbitrate or appease it. He just kept saying that he did not favor a particular candidate, and that he would devote himself to the fair management of the upcoming election. The president's cautious stance as a bystander made Lee displeased, while it encouraged Rhee to break away from the NKP. At any rate, continuous allegations were made that the president sided with Rhee. On November 7, President Kim came to announce that he would quit the NKP to stay completely neutral in the December election(*Korea Herald*, November

8, 1997).

According to the Gallup Korea poll dated November 15(See <Figure 1>), Kim Dae-jung gained 34.0%, Lee obtained 24.4%, and Rhee received 23.7%(*Korea Herald*, November 11 and 18, 1997; and *Chosun Ilbo*, November 23, 1997). By this time, Lee Hoi-chang managed to revamp his party. He succeeded in merging the NKP with the small Democratic Party led by Cho Soon. The merged party was named the Grand National Party. By changing the party label, Lee showed his determination to distance himself completely from President Kim Young-sam. Cho, formerly a renowned professor of economics at Seoul National University and the Seoul city mayor, became the party's official leader. His reputation as an economic expert was expected to benefit Lee at a time when enormous concern was prevailing over the ailing national economy(*Korea Herald*, November 18, 1997). Also, the conflict within his party subdued.

As can be seen from <Figure 1>, the Gallup Korea poll conducted in November 22 showed that Kim was still in the lead with 33.1%. Lee scored 28.9%, and Rhee remained in a distant third(20.5%). These poll results were the last ones that were allowed to be made public before the official campaign began. Later, Lee Hoi-chang further closed in on front-running Kim Dae-jung. According to the poll data released after the closure of balloting, the difference in popularity rating between these two leading candidates came within a margin of error on the eve of the election day(*Chosun Ilbo*, November 23 and December 19, 1997; and *Korea Herald*, November 25, 1997).

III. Official Campaign

Presidential candidates and their parties began the 22-day official campaign on November 26. The electoral law was revised prior to the December election, which brought about major changes in campaign styles. Under the revised law, candidates were barred from holding massive outdoor rallies. Previously, candidates mobilized

huge audiences by paying many of them for their attendance. Instead, the new law induced candidates to engage in campaigning through the mass media, especially television. TV debates were to be sponsored by the state. Each candidate could air a limited frequency of paid campaign commercials on TV. The law also increased the amount of public expenditure for candidates' election campaigning, which amounted to more than half the legal ceiling of spending per candidate(*Korea Herald*, November 3, 1997).

The television debates, introduced for the first time in the presidential election, included only three major candidates. In the three debates, the candidates embroiled much in personal attacks against each other. From the first debate, Lee, Kim and Rhee argued over who was responsible for economic turmoil. Rhee made an offensive against Lee by taking issue with his two sons' exemption from military service. Kim joined Rhee in cornering Lee from time to time. In the second debate, the candidates tried again to assign responsibility for the current political problems to each other. In this debate, Kim, a veteran politician, became the most frequent target of criticism. He was put on the defensive when the debate touched upon his changed advocacy for a parliamentary-cabinet government and also upon his soft stance toward North Korea. In the last debate, they assaulted each other regarding the following issues: renegotiation with the IMF, military service exemption, and political funding(*Korea Times*, December 2 and 15, 1997; and *Korea Herald*, December 2 and 17, 1997).

The actual debates could not well meet the initial expectation that they would serve as a forum for debating substantive policy issues. Despite this shortcoming, TV debates still contributed much to reducing costly and illegal campaign practices. Candidates were given opportunities for appealing directly to millions of voters at one time. Candidates and their parties invested much of their energy and resources in the preparation for the debates. Overall, the introduction of TV debate is positively evaluated(Young-jak Kim, 1998).

Among the candidates, especially Kim Dae-jung welcomed the introduction of TV debate in the presidential campaign. He once said, "If a single opportunity for

TV debate had been given me, I could have been elected the president"(*Korea Herald*, November 26, 1997). Kim's eloquent speech skill was well known publicly. However, his actual debate performance during the official campaign did not remarkably excel that of two other major candidates. The analysis of poll data obtained before and after each debate indicated that for each candidate there occurred slight changes in popularity ratings(*Chosun Ilbo*, April 2, 1998). It is safe to say that TV debates did not significantly help one particular candidate more than the others in gaining electoral support.

Of the three recent presidential elections held over the past decade, the 1997 election was the cheapest one. In this election, illegal campaign practices accountable for high election costs dwindled drastically. Parties spent much less than before for nurturing district parties and other vote-gathering machines. There were no egregious reports concerning the massive provision of services, favors and goodies to voters. Parties poured the bulk of their campaign money into advertising through the mass media within the legal confines. Unlike the previous ruling party, the GNP was determined to play a fair game, and spent less than did the opposition NCNP. The legal limit of campaign funds spent during the official campaign period was set at about 31 billion won. The actual amount of spending reported after the election was approximately 21 billion won for the GNP, 26 billion won for the NCNP, and 13 billion won for the NPP(*Chosun Ilbo*, February 2, 1998)

Despite major positive changes as mentioned above in campaign practices, there was little policy contest in the election. The election was rather ridden by a variety of negative campaigning, such as personal attack, mudslinging, groundless accusation, black propaganda, the arousing of regional antipathy, and the like. In this regard, the electoral campaign has left much to be desired.

IV. Kim Dae-jung's Winning Strategies

Electoral victory does not come upon a candidate in sheer luck. For the significant part, it is earned by the strategic action deliberately designed and executed to defend his or her weaknesses but to exploit those of the opponents. Kim Dae-jung's party devised and applied a set of effective campaign strategies which made him win the electoral game.

First of all, Kim overwhelmed his two major opponents, Lee Hoi-chang and Rhee In-je, by using a divide-and-conquer strategy. As described earlier, Kim's party deliberately incited Lee and Rhee into their division. It was Kim's NCNP that raised public allegations concerning the military service exemption of Lee's two sons. This offense hit Lee right at his Achilles' heel. Lee's popularity slid rapidly, and Rhee was induced to enter into the presidential race as a third-party candidate. When Rhee emerged as Kim's chief rival in early November, Kim's NCNP switched its major target of offense from Lee to Rhee. The party went far to claim that Rhee was financially supported by President Kim Young-sam. But as soon as Rhee's popularity loss was met with Lee's gain around mid-November, Kim and his party moved carefully to help Rhee stay in the race. For instance, in the third TV debate, when Rhee accused Lee of disseminating distorted information about Rhee's election chance and hence of stealing votes, Kim stood by Rhee and called on Lee to make a public apology(*Korea Herald*, November 4 and 28, 1997; and *Korea Times*, December 15, 1997).

Second, Kim Dae-jung and his party resorted to a coalition strategy. A united front was formed with Kim Jong-pil and the United Liberal Democrats(ULD) retaining its bastion of support in the Chungchong region. In light of their political careers and ideological leanings, these two Kims were strange bedfellows. But they knew well that without this "DJP alliance" either one, with the support base concentrated in a particular region, would have enormous difficulty making it in the coming presidential election. Due to the fact that Kim Dae-jung enjoyed a much higher rate of popularity than Kim Jong-pil did, the NCNP and ULD came to an

agreement on the former Kim's joint candidacy. In striking this deal, the NCNP conceded to the ULD's demand for the power-sharing under the current presidential system until early 2000 and then for the formation of a coalition government under a newly introduced parliamentary-cabinet system(*Korea Herald*, October 29 and November 4, 1997).

As smart political maneuvering, the DJP alliance is parallel to the three-party merger done by Kim Young-sam together with President Roh and Kim Jong-pil in 1990. While Kim Young-sam did not sincerely want to adopt a parliamentary-cabinet system, he agreed to Roh and Kim Jong-pil's proposal for it. Kim Young-sam thought that standing as the ruling party's candidate would be the shortest cut to becoming the victor in the 1992 presidential election. With the regime's democratic transition, Kim Young-sam sensed the weakening cleavage of authoritarianism versus democracy, and justified his collaboration with two leaders of the military origin in the cause of saving the nation "torn apart" under a four-party system.

Being alienated by the new mammoth ruling party based on anti-Honam regional alliance, Kim Dae-jung harshly criticized the immorality of the three-party merger. However, he himself later turned out to be a pragmatic politician who put *realpolitik* above moral principles in his pursuit of power. Even though he declared retirement from politics in December 1992, he changed his mind two and a half years afterwards. In achieving his ultimate goal, he felt a dire need for extending his support base beyond Honam voters, and sought for the alliance. Given the greater impact of regional voting relative to that of policy or ideological voting, Kim Dae-jung and his party expected in electoral terms more gains than losses from this alliance. Admittedly, Kim Dae-jung differed from Kim Young-sam in the manner of making political alliance. The former Kim pursued the DJP alliance openly and cautiously, whereas the latter Kim reached the three-party merger in a clandestine and swift way. Still, both Kims ended in a region-based coalition with remaining figures of authoritarianism in order to win the presidency.

Third, Kim Dae-jung kept to the strategy of moderating his past image and

benefited from it in this election. Since the time of the 1992 election, Kim Dae-jung made great endeavors to moderate his old image as a radical or leftist. In 1992, Kim tried to overcome this image problem by carrying out the New DJ plan presenting him as a moderate leader(Man-woo Lee, 1992, 35-65). Yet at that time Kim was still known to be the military's least favorable candidate because of his soft posture toward North Korea. In the summer of 1995, when Kim created the NCNP, he recruited several ex-generals into the party's high-ranking positions in a way of rectifying his old image. In the 1997 election, the DJP alliance also helped him dissipate the same problem. Differently than the previous elections, this election witnessed no sign ever of the military's suspicion about Kim as a future commander-in-chief.

Of course, in this election, the GNP raised the North Korean issue against Kim. After North Korea broadcast Oh Ik-je's speech, the GNP spokesman expressed the party's suspicion about Kim's relations with Oh. Oh, a former NCNP member, had defected to North Korea. Also, the Agency for National Security Planning announced that it was conducting a probe into the letter allegedly sent Kim by Oh. All these red-scare tactics, however, worked little against Kim. Kim Jong-pil wasted no time to urge the security agency to immediately stop the smear campaign against Kim Dae-jung and to shield this Kim from the controversies concerning the North Korean issues(*Korea Herald*, December 8 and 15, 1997; and *Korea Times*, December 6, 1997).

Last but not least, Kim and his party fully took advantage of the economic crisis which occurred at the campaign's height. While the campaign was under way, the value of the Korean currency fell down sharply. The IMF bailout program was signed on December 3, which triggered public anger over the grave mismanagement of the national economy. Kim Dae-jung was provided with a great opportunity for finding fault with the Kim Young-sam government and the GNP's Lee Hoi-chang. The government and the GNP were held accountable for the "national shame"(*Korea Herald*, December 6, 1997). Of major candidates, only Kim Dae-jung could completely distance himself from the Kim Young-sam government.

On the other hand, Lee could hardly escape from the blame for mismanaging the national economy. Lee was a prime minister under President Kim Young-sam and nominated as the presidential candidate when his party was headed by President Kim.

Kim Dae-jung and his NCNP made a remarkable success not only in the Lee and GNP bashing, but also in persuading voters that the power shift to the opposition would be the best solution to the problem of sagging economy. Each major candidate claimed that he was the most suitable for fulfilling the election pledges, including economic recovery. At the final stage of campaign, Lee's party employed the tactics routinely used by the previous incumbent parties. The GNP tried to appeal to voters under the banner of "stability against chaos." Voters were urged to opt for the status quo rather than the uncertain future which might result from the opposition's victory. Rhee, the youngest candidate, denounced both of the established parties, the GNP and NCNP, and stressed the need for a generational change in the national leadership. The NCNP projected Kim as the most experienced, competent and prepared candidate in comparison with Lee and Rhee, both political rookies. All in all, Kim's campaign alone was consistent, well-focused, and forceful in dealing with the economic crisis and in raising voters' expectation about the leader's prospective role for economic renewal.

In the second TV debate, Kim called for a renegotiation of terms and conditions imposed by the IMF. In response to this, Lee warned that Kim's demand would confuse IMF officials and foreign investors so as to worsen the economy. In fact, Kim's advocacy for the renegotiation prompted foreign investors' exit from the Korean financial market, and the currency value further precipitated. Under such pressure, Kim backed down and promised to adhere to the IMF's conditions. In the third TV debate, Lee attacked Kim for undermining Korea's credibility by demanding the renegotiation. Kim denied Lee's charges, saying that he never refused to accept the IMF agreement itself but that he aired the possibility of adjusting some punitive terms(*Korea Times*, December 8, 11 and 15, 1997). Kim might have blundered out his remarks on the renegotiation. Nonetheless, in pursuing his goal of election, those remarks gained voters' sympathy rather than embarrassed them.

V. Voters' Verdict

Of about 33 million eligible voters, 80.7% turned out in the December 1997 election(See <Table 1>). Kim Dae-jung of the NCNP won the election with 40.3% of the vote. He narrowly defeated Lee Hoi-chang who garnered 38.7%. Rhee In-je trailed far behind in the third place with 19.2%. Of the direct presidential elections since 1952, the 1997 election produced the winner's electoral margin which was the narrowest next to the 1963 election.

<Table 1> Election Results

| | Turnout | Votes | Lee Hoi-chang | Kim Dae-jung | Rhee In-je |
|---------------|---------|------------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Nationwide | 80.7% | 26,058,694 | 38.7% | 40.3% | 19.2% |
| Seoul | 80.7 | 5,939,202 | 40.9 | 44.9 | 12.8 |
| Pusan | 78.9 | 2,124,153 | 53.3 | 15.3 | 29.8 |
| Taegu | 78.9 | 1,347,074 | 72.7 | 12.5 | 13.1 |
| Inchon | 80.2 | 1,314,541 | 36.4 | 38.6 | 23.0 |
| Kwangju | 89.9 | 783,028 | 1.7 | 97.3 | 0.7 |
| Taejon | 78.6 | 692,821 | 29.2 | 45.0 | 24.1 |
| Ulsan | 81.1 | 530,621 | 51.4 | 15.4 | 26.7 |
| Kyonggi | 80.6 | 4,600,113 | 35.5 | 39.3 | 23.6 |
| Kangwon | 78.5 | 846,604 | 43.2 | 23.8 | 30.9 |
| N. Chungchong | 79.3 | 805,509 | 30.8 | 37.4 | 29.4 |
| S. Chungchong | 77.0 | 1,024,001 | 23.5 | 48.3 | 26.1 |
| N. Cholla | 85.5 | 1,190,205 | 4.6 | 92.3 | 2.1 |
| S. Cholla | 87.3 | 1,325,740 | 3.2 | 94.6 | 1.4 |
| N. Kyongsang | 79.2 | 1,574,483 | 61.9 | 13.7 | 21.8 |
| S. Kyongsang | 80.3 | 1,681,596 | 55.1 | 11.0 | 31.3 |
| Cheju | 77.1 | 279,003 | 36.6 | 40.6 | 20.5 |

Note : Minor candidates have been excluded.

Source: The Central Election Management Committee; *Chosun Ilbo*, December 18, 1997.

In explaining voters' candidate choice in the direct presidential elections since the

Third Republic, region has been the dominant factor. The most salient and frequent regional voting takes the following form: a voter supports the candidate who hails from the same region as the one which the voter was born in or strongly identifies with. This is the proactive form of regional voting. In the 1971, 1987 and 1992 presidential elections, major candidates were typically native sons of the Yongnam and Honam regions. In these elections, both Yongnam and Honam voters showed a strong tendency of proactive regional voting.

A voter who is not given an opportunity for casting the ballot in favor of his or her native son may still engage in regional voting by not supporting the candidate who is from the region in keen rivalry with the voter's region. This is the negative form of regional voting. For the first time since the 1963 presidential election, no major candidate came from the Yongnam region in 1997. Based on the past observations, Yongnam voters were expected to engage in negative regional voting this time, that is, voting against Kim Dae-jung who came from the Honam region.

The region-based DJP alliance in the 1997 presidential election suggested another extended form of regional voting. A Chungchong voter might have supported Kim Dae-jung, because Kim Jong-pil, the region's favorite son, formed a tight alliance with the former Kim. The Chungchong voter was led to his or her choice of Kim Dae-jung indirectly through Kim Jong-pil. This is the mediated form of regional voting.

The aggregate and individual survey data alike indicate that a candidate's native region was the most important cue for voters' choice in the 1997 presidential election. As shown in <Table 1>, Kim Dae-jung received overwhelming support in the Honam region (97.3% in Kwangju, 92.3% in North Cholla, and 94.6% in South Cholla). Honam voters demonstrated a tremendously strong tendency of proactive regional voting. In contrast, either Lee Hoi-chang or Rhee In-je, native sons of the Chungchong region, did not obtain an impressive percentage of votes from there. Proactive regional voting is also found by the analysis of the survey data collected by the Institute for Korean Election Studies through the interviews with

a national sample of the electorate immediately after the election. The data are reliable, considering that the percentage of votes cast by the respondents for each major candidate diverges from the comparable official figure only by less than 2%, within a range of sampling error. In the survey, the respondents were asked about their native region. The identification of the voter's native region is useful in the case of Seoul and Kyonggi residents, because a good majority of them originally came from somewhere else. <Table 2> shows that about 9 out of 10 voters from the Honam region nationwide voted for Kim. Neither of Lee or Rhee gained more electoral support among Chungchong natives across the nation than Kim did. Of the three major candidates, only Kim who built up his visibility and charisma owing to his long political career benefited from proactive regional voting.

<Table 2> Voters' Native Region and Candidate Choice (%)

| | (N) | Lee Hoi-chang | Kim Dae-jung | Rhee In-je | Minors | χ^2 (p) |
|---------------|--------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------|--------------|
| Total | (1089) | 37.1 | 41.0 | 17.4 | 4.5 | Cramer's V |
| Native region | | | | | | |
| Seoul | (124) | 38.7 | 41.9 | 14.5 | 4.8 | |
| Kyonggi | (104) | 39.4 | 35.6 | 20.2 | 4.8 | 374.8 |
| Kangwon | (67) | 49.3 | 26.9 | 14.9 | 9.0 | (0.00) |
| Chungchong | (179) | 34.1 | 39.7 | 22.9 | 3.4 | 0.34 |
| Cholla | (258) | 1.9 | 86.4 | 10.5 | 1.2 | |
| Kyongsang | (323) | 59.8 | 12.1 | 21.7 | 6.5 | |
| Cheju/North | (33) | 60.6 | 21.2 | 6.1 | 6.1 | |

Source: A mass questionnaire survey conducted by the Institute for Korean Election Studies from the 19th through the 25th day of December, 1997.

As seen from <Table 1> and <Table 2>, Lee Hoi-chang collected a solid majority of the votes cast by Yongnam residents or natives(53.3% in Pusan, 72.7%

in Taegu, 51.4% in Ulsan, 61.9% in North Kyongsang, and 55.1% in South Kyongsang; and 59.8% of Yongnam natives nationwide). In a great measure, this is explained by negative regional voting. Many Yongnam voters lined up behind Lee out of regional antipathy felt toward Kim Dae-jung. In this election with no major candidate from the Yongnam region, the rivalry between the Yongnam and Honam regions did not disappear. It had a significant effect on voters' candidate choice in these two regions.

As just mentioned above, Kim Dae-jung earned the most votes even among Chungchong residents or natives. This happened because Lee and Rhee divided the support of their native Chungchong voters, and also because Kim Dae-jung was strongly supported by his ally Kim Jong-pil with a stronghold in this region. A good showing of Kim Dae-jung in Taejon, and North and South Chungchong was to a significant extent the outcome of mediated regional voting. Doubtless, Kim Jong-pil contributed much to Kim Dae-jung's electoral success by gathering Chungchong voters' support for the latter Kim.

After all, Lee of the GNP finished first only in the Kangwon and Yongnam regions, while Kim of the NCNP was the front vote-getter in the other regions. This clearly demonstrated the east-west divide of the vote in the 1997 election (N. Y. Lee, 1998). Previously, Kim kept complaining about the detrimental effect of regional voting on his chance of election. On the whole, however, the east-west voting alignment did not at all hurt Kim in this election.

The rivalry between Lee Hoi-chang and Rhee In-je certainly created a favorable campaign environment for Kim Dae-jung. But it is puzzling whether Rhee really played a spoiler role by taking a significantly larger number of votes that would likely have gone to Lee than to Kim. The GNP and the NCNP as well seemed to believe that Lee would be likely to win if Rhee garnered less than 15 percent of the nationwide vote total. The GNP's goal was to disallow Rhee to receive a higher rate of support than 15%, whereas the NCNP wished Rhee to earn around 20% (*Korea Herald*, November 28, 1997). At the late stage of campaign, Lee and the GNP tried hard to make the electorate believe that the votes to be cast in favor

of Rhee would be wasted and would bring about Kim's victory not wanted by a majority of the voters(*Korea Times*, December 15 and 17, 1997). The fact that Rhee actually obtained 19.2% of the vote implies that the GNP failed to stigmatize Rhee as a mere spoiler and to intercept his votes.

The following question remains. Would Lee have won the election if Rhee had earned less than 15%? In this essay, it is argued that this could not be the case. Given the prevalence of regional voting, one can reason in the following way. In the Kangwon and Yongnam regions, if Rhee had received a much lower rate of support than he actually did, Lee would have obtained support at a much higher rate than in the actual case. On the other hand, in the other regions, not Lee but Kim would have won a much higher rate of support in case of Rhee's poor showing. As a consequence, the east-west divide of the vote would have been more dramatically demonstrated than it actually happened. This would have never meant Lee's sure victory. Only if Rhee had withdrawn his candidacy and went further to throw his sincere support for Lee, Lee's campaign could have gained a crucial momentum in the direction of Lee's electoral victory. But this speculation is premised on Rhee's mid-course withdrawal, which was the least likely to occur due to the severe internal strife within the ruling party and to the hostile confrontation between Lee and Rhee.

Kim Dae-jung received a higher rate of votes in all regions, including even Yongnam, than he did in the 1992 election where another set of three major candidates competed. In explaining Kim's electoral success, other factors than regional voting should be taken into account. In this analysis, partisan voting and economic voting are emphasized.

Korean political parties are ever-shifting because of frequent splits and mergers. The notion of party identification, a relatively long-term psychological attachment to a specific political party, has no much meaning. Also, political parties are dominated by personalities, not by ideological or policy lines. Thus, a voter's party preference solicited by a survey question is almost the same as his or her preference toward the focal leader of the party. Still, one cannot say that the party factor does

not play an important role for voters' choice. Korean voters usually have *yōya sōngbyang*, socio-psychological tendency that a voter is disposed to maintain a pro-government or pro-opposition stance. This party disposition is not necessarily tied to a specific party or prominent political leader. It is especially significant as a factor impinging on the vote choice in the Korean political context where the presidential election never resulted in the transfer of power to the opposition before the 1997 election(C. W. Park, 1993).

The post-election survey indicated that some 26% of the respondents were pro-government, 31% middle of the road, and 43% pro-opposition at the time of the 1997 election. In terms of partisan disposition, pro-opposition voters outnumbered pro-government voters. It is implied that a plurality of Korean voters had a great deal of sense that the shift of power to the opposition had been long overdue. Against this backdrop, Kim Dae-jung's catch phrase "horizontal transfer of power"(to the opposition) worked to his advantage. <Table 3> shows that the voter's partisan disposition was relevant to his or her calculus of voting decision. The voter who had a stronger partisanship in favor of the government was more likely to vote for Lee Hoi-chang. On the other hand, the voter who leaned more toward the opposition was more supportive of Kim Dae-jung.

There is clear-cut evidence that economic crisis did much damage to Lee Hoi-chang's electoral fortune but helped Kim Dae-jung get elected. In the survey, the respondents were asked which party they thought should take the heaviest responsibility for messing up the economy. Despite all of Lee's efforts made to distance himself from the Kim Young-sam government, a majority of the respondents said that the GNP should be held the most responsible. Only 3% and 1% mentioned the NCNP and the NPP, respectively. The remaining 42% stated that it was difficult to tell which party was to blame. Looking back on the economic policy performance of the Kim Young-sam government, voters already developed willingness to punish Lee who once served in the government. In fact, approximately six out of ten voters who imputed such responsibility to the GNP supported Kim Dae-jung at the polling booth(See <Table 3>).

<Table 3> Voters' Partisanship, Opinions, and Candidate Choice (%)

| | (N) | Lee Hoi-chang | Kim Dae-jung | Rhee In-je | Minors | χ^2 (p) |
|-----------------------------------|--------|------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------|--------------|
| Total | (1089) | 37.1 | 41.0 | 17.4 | 4.5 | Cramer's V |
| Party disposition | | | | | | |
| Pro-government | (285) | 82.8 | 7.7 | 8.1 | 1.4 | 483.4 |
| Centrist | (313) | 40.6 | 30.0 | 22.0 | 7.3 | (0.00) |
| Pro-opposition | (481) | 7.3 | 68.4 | 20.0 | 4.4 | 0.47 |
| Responsible for economic crisis | | | | | | |
| GNP | (601) | 19.3 | 56.6 | 19.0 | 5.2 | 208.9 |
| NCNP | (32) | 37.5 | 43.8 | 15.6 | 3.1 | (0.00) |
| NPP | (12) | 66.7 | 8.3 | 25.0 | 0.0 | 0.25 |
| Hard to tell | (433) | 61.0 | 20.3 | 15.0 | 3.7 | |
| Most competent to recover economy | | | | | | |
| Lee Hoi-chang | (266) | 96.2 | 2.3 | 1.5 | 0.0 | 961.2 |
| Kim Dae-jung | (596) | 14.6 | 70.3 | 12.4 | 2.7 | (0.00) |
| Rhee In-je | (153) | 13.7 | 7.2 | 66.7 | 12.4 | 0.69 |

Source: A mass questionnaire survey conducted by the Institute for Korean Election Studies from the 19th through the 25th day of December, 1997.

As discussed earlier, the economic failure and IMF bailout became a dominating campaign issue. In the survey, the respondents were also asked which candidate they thought was the most competent for resolving the nation's crisis, especially the economic one. Well over the half(55%) of the respondents said that Kim Dae-jung was the most competent candidate in this regard. Only 24% and 15% chose Lee and Rhee, respectively. It is remarkable that Kim was seen as the best qualified problem solver by a good majority of voters. Furthermore, voters' prospective evaluation of candidates' capability for performing the leadership role was strongly correlated to their vote choice. In <Table 3>, 96% of the respondents who perceived Lee to be the most competent voted for him. About 70% of those who

considered Kim Dae-jung as the most capable registered their support for Kim. In brief, economic voting is a necessary ingredient in explaining the results of the 1997 election(H. Lee, 1998).

VI. Conclusion

About half a year before the December 1997 presidential election, the division of the ruling party was set in motion by the process of choosing its presidential nominee. It finally produced two major candidates originating from the same party, and became a propitious omen for Kim Dae-jung's electoral success. The legal frameworks of the electoral game, previously discriminant against opposition candidates, were revised prior to the election so that they could ensure much cleaner and fairer campaigning. Thus, Kim was put at a point of vantage on the electoral stage.

Kim's election strategies were effective. By building a coalition with Kim Jong-pil, Kim Dae-jung expanded the regional support base and also to some extent, conservative voters' support. Kim Dae-jung's long continued strategy of moderating his past radical image bore fruit in this election. His opponents never succeeded in stirring up voters' red-scare complex against him. He aptly took advantage of the economic crisis which culminated during the campaign.

Eventually, a plurality of voters responded to Kim Dae-jung's appeals and elected him the president. In terms of voters' regional identity, Honam voters and to a lesser degree, Chungchong voters were intense supporters for him. On the partisanship dimension, pro-opposition voters having sympathy with the opposition's first ever victory in the presidential election were sincere supporters for him. In addition, those voters who blamed the GNP for leading the country to the verge of economic disaster or had good hope of economic recovery under Kim's future leadership were strong supporters for him.

The 1997 presidential election not only ended up with Kim Dae-jung's personal

dramatic victory, but it also signified the progress of Korean democracy over the past decade. In 1987, the president was elected by direct popular vote for the first time in 16 years. In 1992, the election of a civilian leader as the president dissipated the prolonged controversy on political legitimacy and completed democratic transition. The 1997 election accomplished the first alternation of presidential power between competing parties by the people's choice. This political achievement made at the time of economic hardship defies the view that the turnover of power is hardly possible in a polity under the influence of Confucianism like Korea. When it comes to the social base of power, the election outcome reflects a long-wanted victory of Honam voters. This can be a beginning for the easing of their pent-up resentments and of divisive regional rivalry. A succession of the three presidential elections held in the past decade have demonstrated that the Korean polity is heading its way for democratic consolidation.

The Kim Dae-jung government has been born, amidst deep economic crisis, with the urgent and onerous mission of resolving the crisis. In garnering electoral votes, Kim and his party were committed to wide-ranging policies which conflict readily with each other, such as the restructuring of the economy and the stabilization of employment. The nature of the crisis and the public's high expectation about its resolution dictate the government's prompt action. Once the government is willing to expeditiously execute the relevant policies, it can hardly accommodate major interests and demands at the same time. This will certainly generate a key dilemma for the Kim government.

To ride successfully on the bumpy road of politics toward the completion of his mission, President Kim Dae-jung will continue for some time to maintain the harmony of the DJP alliance as agreed before the election. But it is questionable if this alliance, having internal contradictions, is able to last for a reasonably long span of time. The two Kims and their parties in the ruling coalition have much differing political backgrounds. The DJP alliance, which sowed the seed of Kim Dae-jung's electoral success, is in essence a marriage of political convenience. Once it has become in power, it may turn into the source of governing failure. President

Kim Dae-jung has something of potential enemy within. There exists the possibility of policy impasse and inconsistency. Moreover, as long as power-sharing between the NCNP and the ULD goes on, so does the struggle over the distribution of political spoils. The give and take will not be always easy to achieve for sharing cabinet portfolios, legislative leadership positions, and other public offices or governmental resources. Most importantly, it remains to be seen if President Kim and his NCNP will sincerely will go hand in hand with Kim Jong-pil and his ULD to pursue the constitutional revision for adopting a parliamentary-cabinet system of government.

Next, the Kim Dae-jung government needs to obtain necessary cooperation from the opposition. When President Kim was inaugurated, his NCNP held only 78 seats in the 299-member National Assembly. In Korean politics, the president's party never had such a poor legislative minority status before. Even when the NCNP was combined with Kim Jong-pil's ULD with 43 seats, the coalition still remained a minority. On the other hand, the GNP existed as a single opposition majority commanding 165 seats. The management of interparty and executive-legislative relations has posed a great challenge for Kim's political leadership.

As a major opposition leader, Kim Dae-jung had criticized the three-party merger or the ruling party's recruitment of legislative members across the party line for managing to maintain a majority status. In line with his previous position, President Kim initially tried to obtain the legislature's approval of his major proposals concerning substantive or personnel policies, given the existing composition of legislative parties. But the inertia of legislative conflict and deadlock over the issues of high partisan interests has continued to show its presence. The GNP officially decided to disapprove the president's nomination of Kim Jong-pil as the prime minister. On March 1, 1998, the legislative session for voting on the premier designate was abruptly adjourned, since it was interrupted by the ruling coalition claiming that the GNP violated the National Assembly Law in having its members follow the party line(*Korea Times*, March 2, 1998). At this writing, Kim

Jong-pil is serving as the acting premier, with the required consent procedure being still pending in the legislature. A series of constitutional controversies are revolving around this issue. After all, President Kim Dae-jung has come to reach second thoughts about forming a working legislative majority.

As a politician, Kim Dae-jung has a flexible style in which he may change his previously steadfast position to take advantage of the altered political situation. But when he adapts this way, he does so cautiously and patiently. When he has to change his position, he comes up with sufficient rationale for defending it. To minimize the adverse effect of his shifted position, he waits for the strongly unfavorable political climate to subside in due time. In managing the relationship with the opposition in the National Assembly, a probable course of action taken by him would be first to blame the uncooperative behavior of the GNP for the legislative deadlock, and next to recruit some legislative members of the GNP into the ruling coalition whenever some propitious opportunity arises. Legislative members, insecure about their reelection due to the location of their districts within the NCNP or ULD stronghold, are most vulnerable to this cross-party recruitment attempt. In case the GNP loses its legislative majority, no single majority party will exist for the time being. The coalition of the NCNP and ULD is likely to make an appeasing gesture toward the 8-seat NPP or a few independents for building working majorities in the legislature.

One cannot remove the possibility of interparty realignments along with the split of the GNP. Currently, the party's leadership is not sturdy and strong. Also, the party is not cohesive enough to resist political pressure from the outside. Lee Hoi-chang resigned from his legislative seat before the presidential election, and as the party's honorary president exercises no substantive power. Cho Soon, the party's official leader, does not hold the legislative seat and is basically a political novice. The GNP is now an umbrella of several factions led by their respective bosses. If the party is manipulated by the ruling coalition, its centrifugal forces may tear it into pieces.

Interparty and executive-legislative relations are no less uncertain under the

leadership of Kim Dae-jung than that of ex-President Roh or Kim Young-sam. The most drastic change, including the termination of the DJP alliance, may come about when Kim Jong-pil and his ULD initiate the planned constitutional revision with their full force.

In any case, President Kim Dae-jung's achievement and the further progress of democratization in Korea hinge largely on the extent to which he is capable of building cooperative relations with the opposition and the National Assembly without emasculating them.

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