

Historical Development of Civil Society in Korea since 1987*

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In this paper, we provide a historical overview of the development of Korea's civil society since its transition to democracy in 1987. After a theoretical review of civil society focused on the comparison between the East and the West, we analyze seven governments of Korea since the democratic transition in 1987 in terms of the change in civil society and its engagement with the state, underscoring the continued role of civil society in democratic consolidation and deepening. Then, we discuss some prominent characteristics of Korean civil society in the post-transitional period, such as the diversification of the modes of state-civil society relationship, politicization and ideological polarization of civil society, "political societization" of civil society, the widened gap between central and local civil societies, and financial dependency of civil society on the state. We conclude the paper with a few important cautions against excessive political societization of civil society and the resultant depopulation and potential delegitimation of the civil society arena.

Keywords: Korea, Civil Society, Democratization, State-Civil Society Relations, Political Society

1. INTRODUCTION

In the literature on democratic transition and consolidation, the status of South Korea (Korea hereinafter) is rather distinct. The Korean case is considered to be an anomaly that does not conform well to the repeatedly confirmed conclusion of the "elitist" paradigm that was predominant in the 1980s (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Higley and Gunther, 1992). Rather, Korea's transition is mobilization-led and mass-ascendant, prompting many analysts to characterize it as a "movement-driven transition" (Cho, 1998; Kim, 2000; Choi, 2002). The Korean case, in fact, serves as one of the precursors of the emergent wave of "bottom-up" transitions that ultimately swept Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe in the 1990s, which makes clear contrast with the earlier top-down "pacted" transitions in Southern Europe and Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s. What is even more unique in the case of Korea is that civil society and its mobilization has continued to play important roles even in the post-transitional period, long into the consolidational phase, spearheading and sustaining diverse institutional and policy reform campaigns (Kim, 2002).

In this paper, we examine the historical development of Korean civil society since 1987. We analyze how the composition of civil society and civil society's relationship with the state have changed over the past 30 years of seven different governments, both conservative and progressive. The paper specifically proceeds as follows. We first discuss several conceptual and theoretical issues related to civil society. Next we compare Korean civil society before and after the democratic transition in 1987. Then we ponder several prominent characteristics of Korean civil society. We conclude the paper with a few thoughts on the future of Korean civil society.

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2. CIVIL SOCIETY: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

Civil society is defined as the “sphere intermediate between the family and the state, in which social actors pursue neither profit within the market nor power within the state” (Schwartz, 2003: 23). Civil society consists of sustained, organized social activity that occurs in groups that are formed outside the state, the market, and the family. Philippe Schmitter (1997) encapsulates several essential characteristics of civil society: 1) “dual autonomy”—civil society is relatively independent of both public authorities and private units of production and reproduction; 2) civil society has the capacity for collective action in defense of or in pursuit of their interests and concerns; 3) “nonusurpation”—civil society does not seek to replace state agents or to run the polity; and 4) civil society is voluntary in nature.

There has been an interesting discussion on comparing civil society in the West and the East. Schmitter (1997), after presenting a set of insightful conjectures regarding East Asian civil society, concludes that East Asian societies are too diverse to permit any valid generalizations for the region as a whole. However, there seem to exist certain distinctive features of East Asian civil society in contrast with European or North American ones. First of all, East Asian civil society seems to have a limited degree of autonomy from the state. Organizations in East Asian civil society have been dependent upon public authorities to a great degree. This is different from civil societies in Europe and North America, which has traditionally stressed a high degree of autonomy from the state and spontaneity in group formation as their essential characteristics.

In the West, the concept of civil society has always developed in opposition to that of the state. Civil society has been conceived as a sphere against the state. What this view implicitly presupposes is that the state, as a highly centralized governing apparatus, can be conceptually and empirically distinguished from society. Thus, the state-society relations are depicted as a tug of war in which state power and social power confront and conflict each other. Some scholars observe that the case of Korea does not deviate significantly from this classic, Western model of antagonistic state-civil society relations. Bruce Cumings (2002: 29), for example, concludes his analysis of modern political history of Korea by characterizing Korea as a classic case of Habermasian and Gramscian visions of civil society in action where popular protest has “made an indelible contribution” to democracy. In this respect, civil societies in West and East are not very different.

However, some other scholars have contested this oppositional view of civil society by questioning the concept of the centralized state and trying to develop a more nuanced notion. For example, Stephen Krasner (2001) defines the state based on its multiple roles: state as a government, state as an administrative apparatus, state as a ruling class, and state as a normative order. In the meanwhile, Frank Schwartz and Susan Pharr (2003) explain the four possible roles the state may play in relation to the formation of civil society, i.e., inspire, enable, constrain, and create. According to them, we need to distinguish two different scopes of the concept of the state: one is a narrower one meaning a ruling administration, the other is a wider one denoting a national community. In the West, the state is more often thought of as an equivalent to the former, namely as a government administration. In contrast, the state in East Asia has been conceptualized both as an administrative power machinery (*zhengfu*) and a broader, cultural idea of a nation (*guojia*).

Thus, even when the state as a political apparatus is not organizationally powerful, state order is considered hegemonic and totalizing, overbearing society and encroaching on the

lives of its people. The power of the state is engrained in the consciousness and behavior of the people, who negotiate and maneuver around it as if a cultural given (Siu, 1989). This has its origins in the Confucian tradition shared in the East Asian region, because the concept of the state is an extension of the concept of the family in Confucianism. According to Tu Weiming (1989, 1993), in the Confucian notion of the proper relation between state and society, civil society does not represent the space between the family and the state in an oppositional sense. Rather, it offers mediating cultural institutions between the two.

The distinctive features of East Asian civil society seem to derive from the different ways in which the public and the private are conceptualized in the West and the East. In the West, the public and the private seem to be differentiated more clearly than it is the case with East Asia, and thus, civil society, as part of the private, is clearly contrasted with the public, which is the domain of the state. As such, civil society in the West has appeared and developed as a concept and actor in opposition to the state. In East Asia, however, the line between the public and the private has been relatively blurred. For example, in understanding state-society relationships in China, many scholars have found it necessary to appreciate the overlapping and interlocking relations between “official (*guan*),” “public (*gong*),” and “private (*si*)” rather than presupposing a dichotomous distinction between the public and the private.

According to these scholars, elite gentry activism (political action and reaction) in late imperial China was engaged in three different domains consisting of *guan* (the arena of “official” or bureaucratic engagement), *gong* (the licit realm of “public weal” affairs), and *si* (self-interest illicitly invading the public domain), struggling to reconcile the public, private, and official domains (Rankin, 1990, 1993; Rowe, 1993; Wakeman, Jr., 1993, 1998). During this struggle, “public (*gong*)” responsibilities and “private (*si*)” interests often appear to be inextricably entangled and intentionally confused by communally spirited elites who were also demonstrably self-serving, leading to a blurring of boundaries between the public and the private (Wakeman, Jr., 1998: 168). As a result, in China, the public and the private grew categorically confused, intersected obliquely, and the lines between “official (*guan*),” “public (*gong*),” and “private (*si*)” were also less than distinct (Wakeman, Jr., 1993: 132).

The ambiguous lines between “official (*guan*),” “public (*gong*),” and “private (*si*)” led some scholars to suggest the idea of intermediate arenas between state and society in China. For example, Rankin argues that intermediate arenas, distinguished both from direct state administration or coercive control and from private spheres, particularly of family or other kin groups but also of individual businesses, apolitical friendship networks, and other activities that do not concern matters of common interest, could be found in the many faceted voluntary involvement of local elites in running local affairs outside of bureaucratic frameworks (Rankin, 1993: 160-161).¹ Huang also proposed the term “third realm” to capture the intermediate space between state and society and presented some examples of this third realm in imperial, Republican, and contemporary China, such as local public services like water control, famine relief, or defense undertaken with the participation of both state and

¹ According to Rankin, from the 17th through the 19th century, the use of Chinese term, *gong* or public, extended in practice to the extrabureaucratic activities of the people (elites) as well as officials, and social autonomy involved in local affairs. Extrabureaucratic activities of the local elite were broad in scope, including discussion; institutional support for welfare, education, and religious purposes; social work; sponsorships and donations; supervision of building or repairing local infrastructure that does not require a permanent institutional organization, etc. (Rankin, 1993: 160-161).

society (Huang, 1993).

As illustrated so far, the relations between state and society in East Asia developed in ways different from the binary opposition which is an ideal type abstracted from early modern and modern Western experience. Civil society in East Asia has developed in co-existence, not in conflict, with the state, receiving support and funding from the latter. Therefore, the mechanical application of the Western model of civil society to the East Asian experience is not appropriate and a more sophisticated alternative construct needs to be proposed to understand the relationships between state and society in East Asia.

3. CIVIL SOCIETY IN KOREA IN THE PRE- AND POST-TRANSITIONAL PERIODS

Korea's civil society under pre-1987 authoritarianism comprised largely of three categories. The first was pro-government or even governmentalized social groups such as the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), Korea Employers' Federation (KEF), and the Federation of Korean Industries (FKI). However, it is questionable if these social groups can be called civil society groups. Often openly supportive of the incumbent authoritarian regimes, these groups seriously lacked organizational autonomy from the state. Their leaders were not self-elected but selected by the government, and their management was closely monitored and supervised by the state. The second category of social groups included the outlawed underground organizations and dissident groups that were not recognized but repressed by the state. These groups coordinated and spearheaded intensive anti-government and pro-democracy movement campaigns. The last was non-political, relatively "neutral" social groups such as the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), which were few in number and had little influence over politics or policymaking.

Since Korea's transition to democracy and its first direct presidential election in 1987 ("founding elections"), however, civil society in the country has undergone significant change and has resultantly become quite different from that under the previous authoritarian regimes. Most of all, pro-government social groups that had lacked independence from the authoritarian state incrementally gained autonomy from state control. Also, illegal underground organizations and dissident groups were granted legal status and state recognition. Meanwhile, new "citizens' movement groups," such as the Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ), the Korean Federation for Environmental Movement (KFEM), and the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), emerged and mushroomed. The proliferation of these new social groups through the 1990s brought about substantial expansion of the civil society sphere in Korea. Just as Korea's economy witnessed a compressed development during the 1960s-80s, Korea's civil society sphere witnessed compressed development during the 1990s. As a result of all these multiple changes, civil society in Korea has become much more diverse and variegated as compared with that during the pre-transitional period. In the following, we will briefly discuss how the development of civil society in Korea and its relationship with the state have unfolded over the past 30 years of seven different governments, both conservative and progressive, after the 1987 democratic transition. We will mostly focus on those civil society groups that emerged in the aftermath of the democratic transition and have led various movements and campaigns to demand social, political, and economic reforms, because the contributions of the formerly "governmentalized" organizations and "neutral" associations have been marginal as compared with those of the new "citizens' movement groups."

The first presidential election after the June Democracy Uprising in 1987, held in December of the same year, ironically resulted in the election of the ruling Democratic Justice Party candidate, Roh Tae-woo. Roh was a former military general who had been deeply involved in the bloody military coup of 1979-80 and the subsequent consolidation of the authoritarian political order. Confronted with the unbelievable, almost surreal, reality of Roh's election, civil society groups, especially those groups that prematurely (and wrongly) concluded that they had won the strenuous pro-democracy struggle against Chun and Roh's authoritarianism, could not but continue their democracy movement. They persistently questioned and challenged the legitimacy of the Roh government (1988-93), trying to convince the public that Roh's regime was just a continuation of Chun's. Social movement groups were alarmed by the Roh government's continued hard-line policy toward civil society and, in particular, by the grand party merger in January 1990 to form the conservative Democratic Liberal Party. They concentrated their efforts on organizing a set of national umbrella associations, such as the National Council of University Student Representatives (NCUSR), the Korea Coalition for National Democracy Movement (KCNDM), the Korean Peasant Movement Coalition (KPMC), and the Korean Teachers' and Educational Workers' Union (KTEWU) to more effectively mobilize and coordinate their various anti-government struggles.

New civil society groups, on the other hand, also substantially increased in number and influence during the Roh government. The Citizens' Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ), one of those new civil society groups, was founded on July 7, 1989, by approximately 1,000 professionals such as professors, lawyers, religious leaders, and others to advance economic justice through citizen power. Subsequently, CCEJ organized a series of movements demanding reinforced government regulation of real estate speculation, augmented supplies of public housing on long-term loans, increased property taxes for the rich and tax exemptions for the poor, and the independence of the central bank from the state. CCEJ's various activities and campaigns were relatively well received by the public and well covered by the mass media.

During the next Kim Young-sam government (1993-98), Korean civil society's skepticism about and challenge to the democratic legitimacy of the ruling regime noticeably diminished. Rather, civil society was often outwitted by the reformist government. In 1993-1995, the Kim government actively designed and enforced various reform measures, including punishment of corrupt public officials, disclosure of private assets of the public officeholders, enactment of a law stipulating public officeholders' ethics, disempowerment of high ranking military personnel associated with the previous authoritarian regimes, reduction in the size and role of both military and civilian intelligence agencies, and the drastic introduction of a "real name banking account system" intended to cut the collusion between business and politics.

New civil society groups steadily increased their appeal and influence through the Kim Young-sam government. Of the new civil society groups, CCEJ was most prominent. In response to Kim government's initiative to reconfigure state-civil society relations to facilitate broader involvement of social groups in the policymaking process and to promote more cooperation between the government and civil society, CCEJ practically emerged as a crucial partner of the government. For example, CCEJ proved instrumental in Kim's campaign to clean up nepotism and influence-peddling, by building up public pressure and mobilizing popular support for the reform.

Meanwhile, another important civil society organization, People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), was created in 1994. PSPD differentiated itself from

CCEJ, intending to synthesize the old “people’s movement” and the new “citizens’ movement.” PSPD emphasized at its founding that it would, dissimilar to CCEJ, place a focus on social systemic reforms while, similar to CCEJ, exploring new issues and adhering to the principle of nonviolence. PSPD successfully organized campaigns, for example, to monitor and evaluate the performance of government ministries and the National Assembly, to file lawsuits against corrupt public officials, and to protect “whistleblowers” who helped disclose public scandals.

During the Kim Dae-jung government (1998-2003), PSPD emerged as the most influential NGO in Korea, eclipsing its rival CCEJ. PSPD’s success was chiefly thanks to its effective response to Korea’s serious economic crisis during 1997-98 and the subsequent restructuring and reform. Above all, PSPD blamed big business conglomerates for the crisis and vigorously campaigned for speedy corporate reform, pressuring the Kim government to implement more reforms. PSPD’s movement, later dubbed the “Minority Shareholders’ Rights Movement,” was very well received and supported by citizens, intellectuals, and the mass media, prompting the government to accommodate and carry out many of the reform policies PSPD proposed and advocated.

In addition to economic reform, PSPD worked on political reform too. Several months before the general elections in April 2000, it organized the Nakcheon/Nakseon movement in cooperation with many other civil society groups under the umbrella association it formed called Citizens’ Solidarity for the General Elections (CSGE). The Nakcheon/Nakseon movement consisted of two different stages as its name suggests. The first was to release a list of personalities who should not be nominated by parties to run for the upcoming elections (Nakcheon movement). The second stage was, if those “blacklisted” candidates were nominated despite CSGE’s counsel, to run a campaign against their actual elections (Nakseon movement). According to this plan, CSGE announced a list of sixty-six politicians who should not be nominated on January 24 and a list of eighty-six candidates who should not be elected on April 3. The selection criteria for both Nakcheon and Nakseon lists included, for example, corruption scandals, violation of the election laws, lack of legislative activities, subversion of the constitutional order, instigation of regionalism, tax evasion, inappropriate remarks and behaviors during the National Assembly sessions, to name but a few. In the general elections on April 13, 2000, 59 out of 86 candidates on CSGE’s list were not elected, demonstrating the great efficacy of CSGE’s movement.

PSPD also played a role of “policy entrepreneur” during the Kim Dae-jung government, prominently in the process leading up to the legislation of the National Basic Livelihood Security (NBLs) Act in 1999. Since its creation in 1994, PSPD had strived to raise public awareness of the need for a reform of Korea’s social assistance program. Taking advantage of the unprecedented economic crisis in 1997-98, PSPD highlighted, both to the general public and to the legislators, the necessity of enacting the NBLs Act. To overcome the indifference of legislators and the resistance of bureaucrats, it formed an umbrella association called the Solidarity for the Enactment of NBLs Act to launch a nationwide campaign (Fiori and Kim, 2011: 72). Thanks to PSPD’s effective and timely action, the bill eventually passed the National Assembly in August 1999 and was enacted in October 2000.

The influence of civil society groups in Korea continued to expand during the following Roh Moo-hyun government (2003-08).² There was significant growth in the environmental

² The number of civil society groups rapidly increased from 3,900 in 1997 to 7,600 in 1998 to 18,180 in 1999 to 23,017 in 2000 to 25,886 in 2001 (Civic Movement Communication Center, 1997, 2000,

movement, for instance, the movement against the Saemangeum Reclamation Project organized by a coalition of environmental groups, which ultimately persuaded the Local Court to rule that the project should be discontinued. Although this decision was later reversed at the Higher Court and the Supreme Court, the movement clearly demonstrated the importance of ensuring citizens' deliberation and consent before carrying out any major construction projects. Civil society groups also campaigned against the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA). Concerned about a range of negative effects a ratified KORUS FTA would exert on the Korean economy, civil society groups worked together with trade unions, peasant organizations, the progressive Korea Democratic Labor Party, and other movement organizations to spearhead nationwide protests against the government's policy to pursue a KORUS FTA.

One of the most important developments in Korean civil society during the Roh Moo-hyun government was the emergence and expansion of "conservative" social groups. Social groups such as the Free Citizens' Alliance of Korea (FCAK) and the Korea Forum for Progress (KFP) came to influence the policymaking process. Between 1987 in which the transition to democracy took place and 2003 when Roh was inaugurated, the civil society arena in Korea had generally been dominated by "progressive" social groups that largely agreed on democratic reforms, economic equality, and peaceful engagement with North Korea. The public was also sympathetic to those progressive social groups. This would soon change after the rise of "conservative" social groups. These conservative groups or "New Right" organizations had different ideological inclinations from the progressive, decrying too much democracy aka "populism," lamenting the loss of global competitiveness due to the "overemphasis" on public welfare and redistribution, and advocating a more hard-line policy toward the North.

The defeat of the progressive camp and the victory of conservative Lee Myung-bak in the 2007 presidential election were to a large extent enabled by the crystallization and mobilization of conservative social groups during the Roh government. Since its inauguration, the Lee government (2008-13) systematically carried out policies to debilitate progressive social groups and to strengthen conservative ones. For example, it changed the composition of various government-affiliated deliberative and advisory committees that had been dominated by leaders and activists of progressive social groups during the preceding government, by replacing their members with those from conservative "New Right" groups. Also, in the presidential office, the position in charge of civil society affairs called "Senior Presidential Secretary on Civil Society Affairs" was now downgraded to a junior secretary position.

The first year of the Lee presidency was marred by a series of popular protests and candlelight demonstrations. The most notable civic mobilization took place during May-July 2008. The apparent motive for this round of mobilization was citizens' concern with the safety of the beef imported from the U.S. But the protests later expanded to address other outstanding policy issues at the time, such as the opaque manners in which foreign policies of the country were made; the controversial "Korean Grand Canal" construction project; educational reform; and privatization of state corporations.

Another high tide of mass mobilization happened in January of 2009. A group of Yongsan tenants who had been opposing the redevelopment project of the Lee government and demanding fair compensation for the re-settlement were occupying a building to wage sit-

in protests. In the middle of the violent confrontation between the protesters and the police, a fire broke out to kill six people—five tenants and one policeman. When the prosecutorial investigation concluded that the protesters were to blame for the tragedy, civil society groups mobilized themselves to demand a full investigation, appropriate government response, and a promise that similar tragedies would not recur.³

Park Geun-hye was elected to the Korean presidency in December 2012 and was inaugurated in February 2013. In terms of its policies towards civil society, the Park government (2013-17) was not very different from the previous Lee government. It adhered to a hard-line stance on illegal anti-government demonstrations, keeping wary eyes on the progressive civil society groups and their potential alliance with opposition parties and strictly applying “law and order” to candlelight protestors and labor strikers. On the other hand, the Park government maintained a close and cooperative relationship with conservative social groups.

Immediately after Park’s inauguration in February 2013, a series of popular demonstrations, signature collection campaigns, public announcements of anti-government statements, in which activists, students, workers, religious leaders, professors, and teachers took part, followed suit to protest against the intelligence agency’s suspected intervention into the 2012 presidential election. But a greater tide of civic mobilization came in the wake of the tragic sinking of Sewol ferry on April 16, 2014. More than 300 people, mostly young high school students, were killed in the accident. Greatly frustrated by the nonchalance and ineptitude of the top leadership and the irresponsibility of the relevant ministries in handling the disaster and its aftermath, Koreans from all walks of life joined popular protests in support of the victims of the tragedy against the Park government.

The latest upsurge of civil society’s mobilization in Korea occurred in late 2016 through early 2017. Enraged by the media disclosure that Park Geun-hye had been influenced and manipulated by a private friend who assumed no public post to wring money from chaebol tycoons, order illegal dismissals of uncooperative public officials, and interfere in various phases of the policy process, citizens launched a row of mass mobilization asking for a full investigation into the scandal and proper punishment of the president. After several months of massive, intensive, but consistently peaceful weekend demonstrations and protests in the heart of the capital, Park was finally impeached and divested of her presidency in early March of 2017. Park’s successful impeachment, the first of its kind in the history of Korea, reaffirms the pivotal role civil society and its mobilization play in contemporary Korean politics.

4. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF KOREAN CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society after Korea’s democratic transition in 1987 features several significant characteristics. The first is the diversification of the relationship it forges and develops with the state. Under the previous authoritarian rule, the state-society relationship was mainly one of confrontation and conflict, suppression and resistance. But after democratization, the relationship has become far variegated to incorporate other types and modes such as competition and cooperation. The government and civil society groups now compete to

³ Most of the protesters prosecuted at the time were amnestied by the Moon Jae-in government on December 29, 2017.

come up with better policy proposals. They sometimes cooperate to generate and disseminate innovative policy solutions. The rapid growth and expansion of the civil society arena have led to the rise of various modes of relationship—cooperation, mutual assistance, competition, and conflict—within civil society itself too. The competition and cooperation between CCEJ and PSPD over various political, economic, and social issues during the past governments is an excellent example in point.

Second, Korea's civil society has increasingly shown politicization and ideological polarization. This is especially noticeable with regards to the strategy and policy toward North Korea, where Korea's civil society has been sharply divided between left and right, progressive and conservative over the Sunshine policy during the Kim Dae-jung administration. Such polarization has affected civil society's political involvement as well. The progressive PSPD strongly supported left-wing governments such as those under Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. The conservative New Right served as a reliable sponsor for the right-wing governments of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye.

Third, Korea's civil society has actively engaged in real politics, with civic leaders frequently joining political circles. Even the new civil society groups that appeared after the 1987 democratization have tended to concentrate on "old" political, economic, and social issues rather than post-modern issues that had been the focus of the "new social movements" in the West. As civil society continued to address conventional issues and demand institutional reforms, there has been steady "political societization" of civil society, in which individuals or groups of civil society have directly joined or switched to political society. As groups, civil society organizations have been deeply involved in the emergence and governance of past administrations. Examples include CCEJ for the Kim Young-sam administration, PSPD for the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations, and the New Right for the Lee Myung-bak administration. As well, there have been numerous examples of individuals joining real politics. The late Park Se-il, one of the founding members of the CCEJ, served as a senior presidential secretary for the Kim Young-sam administration as well as being a member of the Korean National Assembly representing the conservative Grand National Party. Lee Seok-yeon, the former chairman of the New Right Union, served as the Minister of Government Legislation under the Lee Myung-bak administration. Park Won-soon and Kim Ki-sik, the two iconic founders of PSPD and leading innovators of civic activism in post-transitional Korea, changed their coats to become the mayor of Seoul and a National Assemblyman, respectively. Both obtained their nominations from the progressive Democratic Party—the political party of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun who led the left-wing governments strongly supported by PSPD.

The current Moon Jae-in government (2017-present), which came to power in the aftermath of the intense candlelight protests that had brought about the impeachment of Park Geun-hye, is likely to represent another apex in Korean civil society's direct political involvement. The Moon government officially acknowledges that it is the beneficiary and outgrowth of the "Candlelight Revolution of 2016-17" that ousted the Park government. The new government reinstated the senior secretary position devoted to civil society matters in the presidential office. Dealing with civil society, social innovation, and institutional reform, this position, the "Social Innovation Senior Secretary," is an expanded and reinforced version of the "Civil Society Senior Secretary" during the Roh Moo-hyun years. Moon himself was the Civil Society Senior Secretary between 2004 and 2005.

With the view of realizing "co-governance with civil society," a sizable number of social movement activists and civic leaders have been appointed as presidential staff and

cabinet members of the Moon Jae-in government. In the cabinet, six out of 25 minister-level personnel are former leaders of civic groups. Examples include Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education Kim Sang-kon (former co-chairman of Professors for Democracy and former chairman of the Korea Professors' Union); Minister of Justice Park Sang-ki (former co-representative of CCEJ); Minister of Gender Equality and Family Chung Hyun-baek (former co-representative of PSPD); Minister of the Environment Kim Eun-kyung (former head of Sustainability Center Jiwoo); Kim Sang-jo, Chairperson of Fair Trade Commission (former head of the Center for Economic Reform, PSPD); and Pak Un Jong, Chairperson of the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (former co-head of PSPD). There are even more former civil society leaders among the presidential staff. Jang Ha-sung, former chair of PSPD and a member of Solidarity for Economic Reform, was appointed as the Presidential Senior Advisor for Policy Affairs. Cho Kuk, who was also an active member of PSPD, is now the Senior Presidential Secretary for Civil Affairs. Cho Hyun-ok, who formerly represented Korea Women's Political Solidarity, is currently the Senior Presidential Secretary for Personnel Affairs. And Ha Seung-chang, Senior Presidential Secretary for Social Innovation, used to work at CCEJ.

It is no surprise in this regard that the Moon Jae-in era is being called "the heyday of PSPD," as the administration has drafted so many civic leaders who were or are associated with the progressive NGO. What is notable is that these former civic leaders have come to occupy positions in areas related to the law and the economy (e.g., Minister of Justice, Senior Presidential Secretary for Civil Affairs, Presidential Senior Advisor for Policy Affairs, Chairperson of Fair Trade Commission). Concerning the environment also, both the Minister and Vice Minister of the Environment have been drawn from civil society. The civic leaders' dramatic advance into politics under the Moon Jae-in government is seen as a renaissance and revival of civil society after being driven to near-extinction during the nine years under the past two conservative administrations. But at the same time, there is stinging criticism that civic groups have turned into a "fast track" to officialdom or a "stepping stone" for political appointments. All this "political societization" or even "statization" could result in the "hollowing-out" of civil society, a drainage of civic leaders and a general erosion of the civil society arena.

Fourth, most civic groups' activities have been concentrated in the Seoul area and focused on politics at the center. As mentioned, Korea's civil society has been actively involved in real politics, and with such increasing "political societization," it has deepened its involvement in central politics but has given relatively little attention to regional and local problems. As a corollary, a great gap has been created between the civil society at the center and the civil society in local areas. Therefore, compared with the civil society in the center that performs various functions, the civil society in local areas still remains underdeveloped. Reducing the gap between central civic organizations and local and regional civic groups has become an important task for the deepening of democracy in Korea.

Lastly, Korea's civil society after democratization has become financially dependent on the state. The Kim Dae-jung administration legislated the "NPO Assistance Act" and started to support civic groups that had played a major role in the democratization of Korea. This greatly helped many civil groups resolve their financial problems but at the same time made them depend on state funding.⁴ Past administrations have shown discernable differences

⁴ In 2017, for example, the Ministry of the Interior and Safety selected 200 programs out of 429 applications submitted by civil society organizations and granted 6.4 billion Korean Won (<http://>

in their rather selective funding for civic groups based on their ideological preferences. For instance, the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations gave more funding to progressive civic groups, whereas the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations provided more funding to conservative civic groups. As a result, the preferential state funding for civil society groups has not only aggravated civil society's financial dependency on the state but also cast profound doubt on the neutrality and autonomy of civic groups. Civil society groups in Korea are yet to devise innovative ways to wean away from financial dependency on the state and to achieve stronger budgetary independence.

These five characteristics of Korean civil society in the post-transitional period are evidently interconnected. Moreover, some of them are causally correlated. For example, as the state-civil society relationship becomes diversified and therefore allows room for cooperation, the ruling democratic regime is tempted to solicit and mobilize support from civil society to reinforce its legitimacy and augment its electoral basis, leading to the politicization and fragmentation of civil society along the ideological cleavages in the political society. Also, the incumbent government, in its effort to curry favor from and form an alliance with civil society, also uses various budgetary support programs to placate and manage civil society groups, thus increasing the financial dependency of civil society on the state.

Yet, what is more important than the connectedness or causal correlation between the five characteristics is the common denominator which underlies all of them: the undeniably palpable presence and impact of a strong state. The loosening and eventual collapse of the authoritarian order and the subsequent liberalization of the political arena allowed diverse modes of state-civil society relations to emerge. Civil society groups, at last, has wrung itself out of the binary trap of either conflict or cooptation (or incorporation) to forge a range of new relationships with the state like confrontation, competition, and cooperation. But the Korean state, still powerful and resourceful after the democratic transition, has tended to use civil society elements selectively for various political purposes, therefore resulting in politicization and ideological polarization of the civil society arena.

Civil society's direct engagement with real politics, that is, "political societization" of civil society, originates from civil society's frustration with "indirect" reform movement and campaign to transform the legislature and political parties. When civil society leaders realized that the two rounds of blacklisting movement in 2000 and 2004 had not fundamentally transformed the political arena and culture, some of them decided to directly plunge into politics. However, whether such direct conversion is more effective than civic movement in bringing about systemic change is yet to be seen and assessed.

That civic activism is concentrated in the capital is also a manifestation of the disproportionate importance of central politics in Korea. What Gregory Henderson (1968) aptly dubbed the "politics of the vortex" to characterize Korean politics remains valid. Politics in Korea still revolves around the central government and the legislative and judicial institutions in Seoul. The power of the central government with its vast bureaucratic apparatus also explains the financial dependency of civil society on the state. The central government is equipped with various financial and regulatory instruments to affect and, if it wants to, control civil society organizations. In sum, the five prominent characteristics of Korean civil society, formed historically, point to the still potent effect of a lingering strong state that has survived the post-transitional and post-developmental phase in the 1980s and

even the economic crisis of the late 1990s. The Korean state still enjoys enormous power to affect civil society's composition, configuration, strategies, and activities.

5. CONCLUSION

Unlike many nascent democracies where civil society played no role at all, played a role only up to the transitional phase, or stopped playing a significant role in the consolidational stage, Korea is distinct in that civil society has significantly contributed to both the transition and the consolidation of democracy. Upon a closer look, however, we notice that there have been important changes in civil society and its engagement with the state over different governments in the past three decades.

For the first three consecutive governments after the 1987 democratization, there was an identifiable pattern of augmented and deepened cooperation between civil society and the government. Civil society groups organized and carried out various movements and campaigns, and the democratic governments accommodated civil society's grievances and demands. Meanwhile, the general public opinion and social atmosphere remained supportive of democracy and democratization. Koreans were largely sympathetic to and patient with those civil society activists who had risked their careers and lives in their struggle against the authoritarian regimes. Korean citizens in general felt guilty and grateful towards former movement activists. However, during the Roh Moo-hyun government, a new cycle of mobilization (by progressive civil society groups) vs. countermobilization (by conservative groups) became prominent and continued into the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye governments. Now, the main schism in civil society is no longer between radical and moderate citizens' movement within the progressive camp, but between the progressive camp and the conservative camp. This ideological polarization of civil society and the resultant confrontation between the two camps may have originated from the debate and clash between pro-Sunshiners and anti-Sunshiners with respect to Kim Dae-jung's engagement policy toward North Korea. Whatever the origin is, civil society in Korea today is clearly embattled, which has in turn considerably diminished the unity, credibility, and legitimacy of the civil society vis-à-vis the state, political society, or market.

Now, the political drama of 2016-17 in Korea has swung the pendulum of history to the left and brought about another progressive government. As discussed above, the new government has drawn a significant number of leaders from the civil society realm. With the progressive government's comeback, civil society in Korea is likely to witness another heyday and exert greater influence on politics and policymaking. Meanwhile, the general trends characterizing Korean civil society will endure: organizational and functional differentiation, greater diversity in the mode of civil society-state relations, deepened ideological polarization, increased political societalization and the consequential depopulation of civil society, and escalated concerns about the concentration of civil society activities in the Seoul area and the financial dependency of civil society on the state. All in all, civil society in Korea is at an important crossroads.

With the inauguration of a progressive and civil society-friendly government, civil society in Korea is being offered with numerous new opportunities. At the same time, however, it is being confronted with a herculean challenge: how to retain autonomy and vitality while cooperating and collaborating with the state. The typical civil society-state relations during the pre-transitional period were a classic example of democracy-championing civil society vs.

repressive authoritarian state. But after the transition, democracy no longer solely belongs to civil society. The state is now also an institutional embodiment of democratic legitimacy and mandate. This state, still politically potent and financially endowed, is intent on influencing, utilizing, mobilizing, politicizing, polarizing, depopulating, appeasing, and subsidizing civil society.

In this regard, the pre-transitional period, in which the Korean case seemed more similar to the Western model of “civil society in conflict with the state,” might have been an exception. At the time, Korea, unlike China and Japan where civil society looked so entwined and colluded with the state, seemed to represent an exception to the East Asian pattern, approximating the West where the anti-state, oppositional vision of civil society had been predominant. But now, with the conflictual phase of democratic transition completed, everything seems to be in flux in Korea. It remains to be seen whether the reputation and credibility of Korean civil society, with so much of it enmeshed with the state and political society, will remain intact and untarnished despite the vicissitudes of the performance of the incumbent government. If Korean civil society retains its combative and contentious nature it used to have during the pre-transitional period, we will be able to theorize that the Korean civil society is indeed an empirical anomaly in comparison and in contrast with China and Japan where civil society exists in symbiosis with the ruling state. But if Korean civil society does not attain and maintain autonomy and independence from the strong state that has tremendous symbolic, moral, organizational, budgetary, and popular resources vis-à-vis civil society, we may have to revise our existing interpretation of state-civil society relations in Korea: we may have to acknowledge that Korea is not significantly different from the other East Asian countries where civil society is engaged in activities only under the aegis of the strong state, thereby corroborating the traditional stereotypical image of blurred boundary between the public and the private in the East. Only time will reveal the true nature of Korean civil society.

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