

KOREA'S CRISIS OF SUCCESS

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Korea has finally realized its long-held dreams: economic prosperity, democratic electoral politics, and a sense of military security. By any standard it would be judged a success. The economy continues to grow rapidly. Elections have become "the only game in town" for resolving conflicts over political power, to borrow Adam Przeworski's phrase.¹ Moreover, the policy of military deterrence is yielding positive results as North Korea falls into a deep quagmire of economic crisis and regime decay. Korea has become "another Japan," adding its name to the short list of non-European countries that have succeeded in modernization-cum-democratization (Table 1).

The consolidation of electoral democracy has been particularly rapid under Kim Young Sam.² Upon assuming the presidency in 1993, he launched wide-ranging reforms. Provincial and local elections were reinstated in 1993 after some 30 years of military dictatorship. The government imposed stricter regulations on campaign finance, as well as requiring that all elected officials disclose their personal income and wealth, with the aim of checking the corrosive effects of political corruption on Korea's moral integrity and economic competitiveness. Civil liberties also widened and deepened as an increasing number of social groups acquired a new sense of rights and developed basic skills for political action. These changes had the potential to trigger a profound shift, transforming Korea's system of electoral or formal democracy into a more responsive political regime that guarantees all major social actors a role in national policy making. The new laws on campaign finance and public disclosure of the personal income and

Table 1 — Socioeconomic Transformation of Korea

Composition of Employment by Sector (%)					
Year	Agriculture and Fishery	Mining	Manufac- turing	Social Infra- structure and Others	Per Capita GNP (US\$)
1965					105
1970	50.4	1.2	13.2	35.2	253
1975	45.9	0.5	18.6	35.0	801
1980	34.0	0.9	21.7	43.4	1,741
1985	24.9	1.1	23.4	50.6	2,568
1990	17.9	0.4	27.2	54.5	5,883
1995	12.5	0.2	23.4	64.0	10,076

Year	Roads (km)	Motor Vehicles (thousands)	Urban Population (%)	Total Exports (US\$ in millions)
1965	28,145	39.1		175.1
1970	40,244	126.5	41.1	835.2
1975	44,905	193.9	48.4	5,081.0
1980	46,951	527.7	57.3	17,504.9
1985	52,264	1,113.4	65.3	30,283.1
1990	56,715	3,394.8	74.4	65,015.7
1995	74,237	8,468.9		125,058.0

Source: Agency of Statistics, *Nambukhan kyongjae sahwuesang bikyo* (Comparison of economic and social indicators of North and South Korea), November 1966; Economic and Finance Board, *Hankukui sahwae jipyo* (Social indicators of Korea), 1996.

wealth of elected officials, in particular, had the potential to reduce inequalities in the distribution of political resources among social groups, while provincial and local elections could bring an enlarged political space in which individuals develop new group identities, experiment with novel forms of political organization, and establish institutional channels for expressing their political values and socioeconomic interests.

The most dramatic change since 1993, however, occurred in civil-military relations. Upon assuming power, Kim Young Sam discharged generals and colonels of the Hanahoe ("Society of One"). The Hanahoe had been a major pillar of authoritarian rule before 1987, ready to back President Chun Doo Hwan (1980–88) with a show of naked force whenever a crisis of legitimacy developed, in return for the generous political patronage of public offices. Their purge created a vacuum in military leadership, which Kim Young Sam filled with officers who had been excluded from strategic posts by Hanahoe generals. These men formed an ideal group from which to build a new military leadership loyal to the principle of civilian supremacy. As direct beneficiaries of civilian rule, and rivals of the fallen Hanahoe officers, the new military

leaders saw their careers as intimately tied to the fate of electoral democracy. They became a willing instrument of Kim Young Sam during the uncertain years of democratic consolidation, squeezing Hanahoe officers out of strategic posts while maintaining a high level of professionalism and discipline within the armed forces.

The former military elites of the Fifth Republic (1981–88) were placed on trial for rebellion, subversion, and corruption in 1995. The trial dramatically raised public expectations of political accountability and laid a foundation for new political norms and principles: A military coup would be neither forgiven nor forgotten. Its leaders and accomplices would eventually be prosecuted and punished for the crimes of sabotaging military discipline, subverting the constitutional order, and violating basic human rights. Moreover, personal fortunes amassed through holding public office would be tracked down and seized by the state. The law would rule, and justice would prevail.

These were indeed noble ideals. Yet their establishment as new governing norms and principles was not an easy task for the political leadership. Many coup leaders were from Taegu City and its surrounding Kyungbuk province, the region that had formed a central part of Kim Young Sam's winning coalition in the presidential election of December 1992. The trial thus paved the way for the disintegration of Kim Young Sam's Democratic Liberal Party (DLP), as it was perceived by some in Taegu and Kyungbuk province as a means of ending the political hegemony enjoyed by Taegu and Kyungbuk province since the military coup of 1961. Moreover, the trial raised serious questions about Kim Young Sam's personal integrity, as it represented a betrayal of the military rulers by their former political ally. Many saw Kim Young Sam as akin to a Machiavellian prince, joining forces with the heirs to authoritarian rule in 1990 to forge a new winning coalition in elections, but later turning on them in order to protect himself from growing public outrage over evidence of wrongdoing by the authoritarian rulers.

Yet these were signs of political realignment rather than regime crisis, and disputes over personal integrity rather than regime legitimacy. The trial unleashed a moral debate and polarized public opinion. For Kim Young Sam and his supporters, it was a moral crusade, a "rectification of history" (*yoksa barosaekki*) that would bring final judgment on violators of human rights and civil liberties and establish a legal precedent for punishing coup leaders. The president's critics focused on Kim Young Sam's own personal integrity, in effect denying the moral superiority of the judge to the judged. They saw Kim Young Sam as sacrificing his de facto allies Chun and Roh Tae Woo (1988–93) to his personal political interests and subsequently hiding his Machiavellian intentions behind the rhetoric of a moral crusade. Yet what was *not* debated was more important than what *was* debated. Even those critical of Kim Young Sam's policy of historical rectification did not raise the

specter of a military backlash when the leaders of the military mutiny of 1979 and the national subversion of 1980 were prosecuted in the winter of 1995-96.

Electoral democracy had, in short, become secure in Korea. Coups were no longer conceivable; elections had become free, fair, and highly contested; and basic civil liberties were guaranteed. The "reserved domains" of military power had disappeared, and elected officials increasingly exercised control over the national agenda and policy making. Even the wrongs committed by the authoritarian rulers could be brought to justice without the threat of military retaliation. In other words, Korea's political regime had acquired the three main ingredients of polyarchy: a high level of contestation, widespread participation in the political process, and effective guarantees of human rights and civil liberties.

Party Politics in Chaos

Though electoral democracy was established, the "quality" of politics was another story. Electoral democracy had brought only a quantitative increase in political participation and opposition, with more people openly engaged in struggles for political power and influence. The media had established itself as Korea's "fourth branch" of political power, while interest groups and civic organizations had proliferated and advanced into new social and economic territory. The highly personalized clientele networks that existed within and around state bureaucracies and political parties had become more complex and fluid. The consolidation of electoral democracy had, in short, brought two significant changes in Korean politics. Political society had rapidly expanded in size with the entry of new actors. It had also become more diverse. This expansion and diversification would have been a solid basis for a well-functioning pluralistic political regime had there been a concurrent strengthening of aggregative or integrative political institutions—in particular, political parties.

Just as political society was becoming more active and diverse, however, political parties found themselves in utter disarray. Charismatic leaders broke up political parties and entered into new "marriages of convenience," only to go through another round of divorces and remarriages a few years later, having again failed to come up with a mutually satisfactory formula for power-sharing within Korea's presidential system. Indeed, during this period of consolidation of electoral democracy, the cycle of party mergers and breakups intensified. Korea thus followed a lopsided and deviant path of political development: while political society as a whole expanded and diversified, it also became more fragmented and disorderly as the party system became increasingly incoherent and unstable.

Since 1987, Korean political parties have encountered profound difficulty in developing political discourse that can aggregate diverse societal demands and interests into coherent programs with clear priorities and consistent internal logic, and in the process transform naked power politics into struggles over ideas, values, and public policies. In fact, they have acted in a diametrically opposite way. Political parties have consciously avoided taking positions on socio-economic issues, relying instead on the charisma of party bosses to mobilize mass support during elections. Even after the consolidation of electoral democracy, parties continued to be shallow and weak as institutions, unable to offer distinctive programs and incapable of developing a complex network of organizational linkages to interest groups in civil society. Elections were mere contests of personalities, depriving voters of their right to make rational choices among alternative national policies.

In fact, Korea's political parties had always been weak. Frequent changes in party names could not hide the underlying similarities in organizational and ideological character. All of Korea's parties were "cadre" parties that failed to recruit the masses as active members of the rank and file. This failure in turn sowed the seeds of perennial institutional instability. Neither organizationally checked by the masses nor constrained and disciplined by ideological norms and principles, party bosses could break up and merge their parties at will in the service of personal ambition. Both before and after the transition to electoral democracy in 1987, individual personalities—thoroughly dominated political institutions—

For example, the opposition was thrown into a series of shocks and crises as Kim Dae Jung repeatedly modified his presidential-election strategy beginning in 1987. In November 1987, anticipating victory in a four-party race, Kim Dae Jung broke away from Kim Young Sam's New Korea Democratic Party (NKDP) and established the Peace and Democracy Party (PDP). When his rivals Kim Young Sam, Roh Tae Woo, and Kim Jong Pil joined forces and established a new ruling coalition, the Democratic Liberal Party (DLP), in January 1990, Kim Dae Jung made another sharp U-turn and prepared for his third bid for the presidency in 1992 by engineering a merger of his own party with the Democratic Party (DP). When his efforts failed, he retired from politics. In the spring of 1995, however, a profound crisis of confidence developed among his foes, giving him another opportunity for a political comeback. The crisis proceeded in a typical "Korean" way. President Kim Young Sam, in the middle of his term, became interested in finding a "safe" formula for the transfer of power scheduled for February 1998. The strategy he chose was a policy of generational change. Kim Jong Pil was removed from the chairmanship, a group of Kim Young Sam's younger protégés and confidants assumed key posts

within the DLP, and new recruits filled the posts of party delegates responsible for choosing the 1997 presidential candidate of the governing party.

The DLP was, in short, becoming a party of Kim Young Sam. Caught in a network of delicate checks and balances, and presiding over a body of "party delegates" recently recruited by Kim Young Sam himself, all presidential hopefuls for 1997 had to compete for Kim Young Sam's favor if they were to join the race for the DLP presidential nomination. The president seemed to have found a safe formula for transferring power: he would assure political continuity by having his own man "nominated" as the DLP's presidential candidate. Such a consolidation of personal power over the nomination process, however, entailed a series of realignments in partisan relations that had the potential to endanger the DLP's electoral bases. Kim Jong Pil, for one, rebelled against Kim Young Sam's policy of generational change and established his own party, the Liberal Democratic Federation (LDF), in March 1995. Kim Dae Jung, on the other hand, emerged from retirement and took his faction out of the DP to form the National Council for New Politics (NCNP) in August 1995. Moreover, the two pledged to forge an alliance and work for a joint LDF/NCNP presidential candidacy. Cornered by Kim Jong Pil and Kim Dae Jung, and also shaken by the outburst of public frustration and anger over the past wrongdoing by Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo, Kim Young Sam reacted by announcing his "rectification of history" in December 1995 and gave his governing party a new name—the New Korea Party (NKP)—in February 1996.

Behind the institutional weakness and fragmentation of party politics lay a profound continuity of personalities. The fate of party politics in Korea since 1987 has rested in the hands of two men: Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung. Both have used party mergers and breakups as personal instruments with which to build electoral coalitions. With remarkably stable personal followings across elections, both could force their will on other politicians and manipulate the party system according to political circumstances. A revolt of assemblymen was unthinkable. Most voters identified with the charismatic leaders rather than with political parties, and would continue to support Kim Young Sam or Kim Dae Jung regardless of the political party to which he belonged. A revolt would have cost lesser politicians their political careers.

Turbulence in party politics and the irrelevance of the party system to policy making, then, have been constants in modern Korea. Yet party politics have become increasingly shallow since Korea began its process of democratic consolidation. For example, the cycle of party mergers and breakups has shrunk dramatically, with every presidential election since 1987 an occasion for the reorganization of the party system. Moreover, the scope of partisan realignments has expanded radically to

include all major political parties and all possible mergers. The year 1990 saw the heir to authoritarian military rule (Roh Tae Woo) forming an uneasy alliance with one of the opposition leaders (Kim Young Sam) who had been responsible for bringing down military rule three years earlier. Similarly, 1996 saw another victim of military rule (Kim Dae Jung) entering into an association with one of the leaders of the 1961 coup (Kim Jong Pil). Former enemies became allies and former allies became enemies.

The overall continuity in Korea's party politics is best understood in terms of political culture, which influences how individuals and social groups perceive, define, and diagnose issues and interests. The shift that has occurred within that constant background was due to a variety of factors, including socioeconomic and structural variables. The successful consolidation of electoral democracy and the failure to improve the quality of electoral democracy can be seen as different sides of the same coin: Those factors that facilitated the legitimation of electoral democracy were the same factors that obstructed substantive improvement in party politics.

Political Culture

What constitutes Korea's political culture? How has it been responsible for the organizational and ideological difficulties of Korean party politics? These are formidable questions, for Korea is a country with two different political discourses, one used openly and the other covertly. The duality arose from the country's tragic modern history. Korea was colonized by Japan in 1910, was split in half by the Americans and the Russians in 1945, was thrown into a bloody three-year "Cold War" of its own in 1950, and remained paralyzed economically until 1963. Few countries have experienced such a rapid succession of tragic and violent turns of events, a fact that made Koreans spend decades searching for a culprit. Many in the end blamed Confucianism. In their eyes, the society's traditional belief system was anachronistic, hindering positive responses to international challenges and obstructing socioeconomic modernization. In open political discourse, Confucianism died. Identified as a cause of Korea's downfall during the modern era, it lost legitimacy as Korea's state ideology.

In particular, the beginning of the period of U.S. hegemony in 1945 precipitated a radical negation of Korea's own past and a profound crisis of self-confidence. Out of extensive contact with American advisors and soldiers stationed in Korea emerged a new image of history. The West was judged superior. Only by learning its "way" was Korea expected to preserve national sovereignty and attain economic prosperity. The ideals of "wealthy nation, strong military" (*bukuk kangbyong*) could be realized only through wholesale cultural innovation, which in effect signified the

creation of "new Koreans," imbued with and directed by Western scientific rationality.

The Republic was, in a word, a product of U.S. foreign policy. The Americans provided a nuclear umbrella, orchestrated a massive influx of

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international economic aid, and constructed a complex transnational network of information linking Korea with the Western scientific community. The United States was a lifeline for Korea, supplying the military, economic, and scientific resources needed for state formation and nation building. The Americans' possession of vital resources was, for most Koreans, sufficient to prove the superiority of Western values and methods. The "Western way" was wholly embraced as a cure for all of Korea's ills. It was seen as an effective

formula for economic growth and national security and a new basis for building a "good" society, which was defined as American-style mass consumerism and a popularly based democracy. Liberal democracy and market capitalism became new state ideologies, a presidential regime was instituted, and social actors became increasingly proficient in the modern political rhetoric of liberty and equality. Korea was behaving as if its political goal was to become a "small America" within Asia. Thus all prospects for Confucianism to recover its former glory vanished. On the contrary, in many circles Confucianism was harshly criticized, delegitimated, and dismantled.

Yet the legacy of Confucianism is undisputable. Although Confucianism ceased to be a state ideology, its influence on political understanding, culture, and behavior remained pervasive. The fundamental ontological assumptions of Confucian thought can be understood as Pierre Bourdieu's "doxa" within Korea's political discourse.³ The term refers to a set of subjective principles about human existence whose validity is regarded as self-evident. Individuals find no need to articulate these principles explicitly, because their validity is continuously reaffirmed through everyday social practices and rituals. Doxa lies beyond questioning, and from its hiding place influences in covert ways how individuals perceive, define, and diagnose issues and make normative decisions. Understanding Korea's political culture requires a careful articulation of the unarticulated, a look into the assumptions and principles that lie beyond questioning, and a reflection on what they imply for party politics in terms of both ideology and organization.

Such an inquiry reveals an unusual condition of party politics in Korea. There existed throughout the postwar period a profound disjunction between open discourse and culture. The Confucian tradition posited

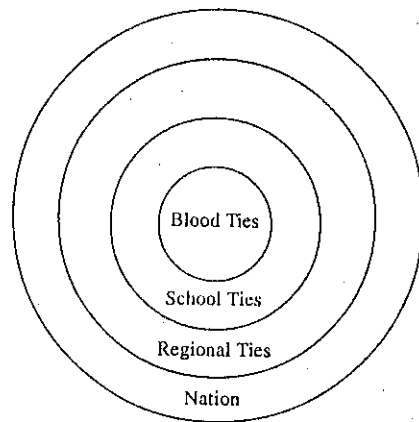
neither the atomistic ontology of the "absolute individual" (characteristic of the social contractarianism of Western Europe) nor a world centered around an all-powerful God who controls destiny by exerting His "irresistible will" on human beings (as in the case of European Christianity). Confucianism instead saw man as a profoundly social being whose self was defined in terms of particularistic human relationships he had with others, while adopting an anthropocentric view of human existence. In fact, Confucianism could be conceptualized as a "religion" of this earthly life, worshiping the "family" as an ideal form of community and finding in its internal workings a formula for building a harmonious social order. The family was the natural moral order. Man was born into its hierarchically organized and asymmetrically woven nexus of interpersonal relations, and could realize his moral self only through the personal cultivation of norms and values embedded in consanguineous relationships. The virtues of benevolence (*in*) and charity (*ja*) were nurtured through man's role as father, while a sense of filial piety and fraternity (*hyojae*) was cultivated through his roles as a son and a brother. The family was a place of ethical perfection, a "school" for raising the model man who saw the furthering of familial (communitarian) harmony as his own personal interest. In Confucian thought, the "whole" (family) was indivisible from its "parts" (individuals). The father acted in the interest of his family, which made obedience to him a moral imperative.

The concept of the "family" was, moreover, a conceptual device, a metaphorical description of the human condition whose spirit existed (or was supposed to exist) in all levels of human life. The village had its own fatherly elders. The state (*gukka*) was a network of asymmetrical familial affection and reciprocity reproduced on a larger scale, with its members possessing different rights and duties defined in particularistic terms according to the positions they occupied within the community.⁴

The nation (*minjok*) was also conceived in consanguineous terms, as "the people of the same blood" (*kyorae*) or "the brothers from one mother" (*dongpo*).⁵ The monarch and the father were identical in role, building authority from a similar source (the virtue of benevolence), exercising it for an identical goal (the furtherance of community interests), and in the process projecting a similar image of the self (a paternal protector). The virtue of loyalty (*chung*), which the subject was to nurture, was likewise an extension of filial piety cultivated by the son in family life.

Herein lay the distinctive principle of Confucianism. The individual lacked absolute sovereignty. He was a relational social being, always placed in a certain position with respect to other people, and conceiving his own rights and duties in particularistic terms. That is, man performed multiple roles as a father, a son, and a brother, and each role implied a different set of rights and duties and required a different code of conduct (*ya*).⁶

Figure 1
The Concentric Circles of Self-Identity



Handwritten notes on the left margin: 血緣 (Blood Ties), 學緣 (School Ties), 地緣 (Regional Ties).

This understanding of the self as a collection of multiple social roles can be illustrated by the group of concentric circles, representing different levels of human relations, shown in Figure 1. The inner core of identity was defined by blood ties (*hyolyon*). The outer rim was national consciousness (*minjok*). The circles lying between those two extremes represent school (*hakyon*) and regional (*jiyon*) ties. Underlying all these relations is a common organizing principle: familial reciprocity based on affection and benevolence.⁷ Familial reciprocity was the source of all virtues. The values of loyalty and sincerity (*sin*) encouraged in public life were the extensions of filial piety and brotherly love championed in family life. The virtue of benevolence was the source of all authority and legitimacy.

As a religion of this earthly life, which found in the "family" the organizational principles of an ethical community, Confucianism could be categorized as an anthropocentric system of political thought. Human existence was found meaningful only in terms of interpersonal familial relationships. Man was his own master, and politics was given privileged status in social life, responsible for building the ideal community where all people's basic needs were met and where "human ethics" (*ilryun*) based on asymmetrical familial reciprocity was meticulously observed by all of its members.⁸ These practical and ethical functions of politics were not in conflict. On the contrary, an ethical life was seen as possible only for those who had won freedom from socioeconomic misery and disorder.⁹ Moreover, the paternalistic provision for everyday needs was itself a moral act embodying the Confucian norm of familial reciprocity.

Confucian politics, then, was both a pragmatic quest for social order and economic prosperity and a moral crusade to build a community

based on human ethics. The Confucian ideal was in fact a careful synthesis or balancing of practical and moral needs (*sijungjido*). A sage was aware of moral imperatives as well as situational requirements. He sought the universal ideals (*kyong*) within the constraints of the given situation (*kwon*). This state of mind was the "mid way" (*jung*)—not the "arithmetic" midpoint between the *kyong* and *kwon* but a superior state of mind reached through a synthesis of ethical and practical knowledge.¹⁰

Religion and Class

This anthropocentric ontology—modern Korea's doxa—had profound implications for party politics. Foremost among them was the political irrelevance of religion. Modern Korea was a multireligious society, but its religions, banished from politics by the anthropocentrism of Confucian familism, failed to become a basic organizing principle of party politics. The religions of Korea neither fought among themselves as orthodoxies and heresies nor joined forces together against their common "enemy," the state, to wage a war of the spiritual against the secular. Rather, religion was strictly a matter of personal preference, to be practiced in homes, monasteries, and churches with the objective of bettering one's *personal* fortune (*bok*) in this earthly life. This prevented the spiritual and secular realms of human life from being in direct conflict. In the humanist Confucian world, for example, there did not exist a well-developed conception of God. On the other hand, in the shamanist world, gods existed to help man attain wealth (*bu*), longevity (*su*), male descendants (*ja*), and honor (*kwi*).¹¹ In Korea, Buddhism and Christianity, which originally posited sharp dichotomies between the earthly world and the hereafter, body and spirit, lost their tendency to transcend, oppose, conquer, and transform the secular world in accordance with their own vision through their syncretic interaction with Korea's native, anthropocentric belief systems of shamanism and Confucianism.¹² The religions of Korea, whether imported from abroad or inherited from the past, did not have a vision for the future that directly conflicted with the secular reality.¹³ As a result, Korea's religions did not fracture and reintegrate politics along the cleavage of church versus state as European religions did.

The political culture of anthropocentric familism also discouraged the development of organized class politics. By definition, the concentric circles of the self constituted by Confucianism placed all individuals and groups into one large "family" whose members had common bonds and interests and performed mutually dependent roles. In effect, this preempted the formation of deep social cleavages that permanently divide individuals into hostile blocs of "us" versus "them." Instead of drawing a *line* of cleavage, too deep and wide for individuals to cross,

Koreans drew concentric *circles* of the self, permanently tying it to others, and searched for the bonds that would dissolve "you" and "I" into a common "we." The concentric circles of blood, school, and regional ties joined individuals of different class backgrounds. There were always larger circles of social identity ready to reduce the sense of difference that individuals might have found among themselves at the lower levels of personal ties.

But the factor that most decisively delegitimized class as a basis for political action was the Korean War (1950-53). The communist regime of North Korea launched a military invasion in June 1950 and waged a bloody class war wherever its Red Army advanced. The experience of the war left Koreans permanently scarred and "colorblind," unable or unwilling to distinguish between social democracy and brutal Stalinism. For most Koreans, the "Left" was a force against human ethics. It had denied the existence of familial harmony by waging a war against its southern "brothers." With such an image of the "Left" frozen in the minds of Koreans, the political fate of would-be Leftists was sealed. Marxism, whether social democratic or Stalinist, could not recover its strength after the Korean War. Its adherents were isolated from the rest of political society, and any sign of their reorganization into a political force, however minor, precipitated the state's rage. Most Koreans supported or at least acquiesced in this ideological repression.

The resultant political society could hardly differ more from that of Western Europe. The two lines of cleavage that structured West European party politics were absent or underdeveloped in Korea.¹⁹ Religion was irrelevant in politics, while class had lost legitimacy as a basis of political action. Korea lacked these two common bases for organizing individuals into mutually exclusive political groups not because it was a monoreligious, classless society (Table 2), but because its distinctive culture of anthropocentric familism, combined with the shock of the Korean War, had prevented individuals from dividing themselves along the lines of religion and class. The distance that individuals felt from those of different religious or class backgrounds did not develop into mutually exclusive programs of organized political action, because there were no ideologies affirming those feelings of distance and linking them with a higher purpose, such as the remolding of society according to religious or Marxist ideals.

This does not mean, however, that Korea's civil society remained unorganized. On the contrary, civil society became increasingly diverse as more people joined the struggle for political power and influence. The absence of transcendent religions and class consciousness, however, meant that new social actors emerged without a concurrent strengthening of the institutions of interest aggregation within civil society. Society divided into groups, but the nation's Confucian heritage prevented them from reconstituting into a subsociety based on class or religion.

Table 2 — Religions of Modern Korea

	Number of Adherents (thousands)	Percentage of Total Population
Buddhism	10,321	23.2
Protestantism	8,760	19.7
Catholicism	2,951	6.6
Confucianism	211	0.5
Won Buddhism	87	0.2
Chondokyo	28	0.1
Daejongkyo	8	0.0
Other	232	0.5
Total	22,598	50.7
No religion	21,953	49.3

Source: Agency of Statistics.

The irrelevance of religion and class to mass organization and collective action was naturally a double-edged sword for democratic consolidation. Because Korea was spared religious and class conflicts, Korea's transition to electoral democracy—once it got under way—was relatively smooth, and the new electoral democracy was able to sink its roots rapidly. There were no political actors with sufficient organizational power and ideological will to question the legitimacy of elections and offer alternative ways to settle conflicts over the distribution of power and wealth.

The relative ease of Korea's transition to electoral democracy, however, came at a substantial cost. Religious and class conflicts—if moderate in depth and scope—can be a powerful force for bringing *qualitative* organizational and ideological advances in party politics. They can provide the basis for organizing ideologically distinct parties, which ensure democratic accountability and responsiveness of elected officials, as in Western Europe. Indeed, the whole project of the Enlightenment began in Western Europe as a political struggle against the state, the church, and inherited wealth—forces that were perceived as obstructing human liberation and the growth of autonomous, virtuous, and responsible citizenship. From alternative religions-and-class-ideologies, in other words, were born the modern political discourses of liberty-and-equality. The religions and class ideologies of Western Europe provided the basic organizing principles of modern mass politics and generated a new vision of the future.

Korea was another story. After the consolidation of electoral democracy, the political irrelevance of religion and class made it a polity without a working idea of democracy. It lacked a well-developed

political ideology that could generate a continuous flow of ideas and initiatives, justifying each as an integral part of its drive toward democracy and endowing individuals with a growing awareness of political liberty and civil rights. In fact, the irrelevance of religion and class deprived elections of their substance, of issues to be decided. After 1987, elections became the final arbiter of political conflicts, but Koreans were unsure of what those conflicts should be. And they were left without substantially distinct or organizationally stable parties, much less an effective party system.

A Crisis of Success

The irrelevance of religion and class to party politics has been a constant in Korea since 1953. As mentioned above, however, the instability of party politics increased dramatically beginning in 1987. What accounts for this shift? To answer this question, we must carefully analyze two historical changes. One was democratic consolidation itself. The other was Korea's economic miracle. They increasingly made irrelevant the one diffusely felt cleavage that had previously checked the powerful centrifugal forces that were inherent in Korea's familistic political society and had given its generically amorphous party politics a rudimentary form of organization: democracy versus development. Korea was, in essence, suffering a crisis of political and economic success. After 1987, the Korean electorate could no longer be galvanized by a call for democracy. Similarly, economic growth had become a way of life, taken for granted and seldom acknowledged as a product of Korea's political leadership. After 1987, democracy and development ceased to be issues. Deprived of its primary organizing principle, Korean party politics was thrown into a severe institutional crisis. Before, Koreans had had goals to fight for. After 1987, expediency alone ruled Korea's party politics.

The phenomenon of the "crisis of success" calls for a reanalysis of Korean political culture, an in-depth examination of how Koreans understood democracy. The consolidation of electoral democracy could have precipitated a crisis of success only if political actors had developed nothing more than a *procedural* conception of democracy, defining it strictly in terms of the existence of free and fair elections. In such a cultural context, the consolidation of electoral democracy would imply the disappearance of the objective of political struggle. In contrast, a polity that had a more *substantive* understanding of democracy before electoral democracy became consolidated—viewing elections as a "free market" of conflicting political ideas and beliefs about liberty and equality—would find the consolidation of democracy accompanied by the strengthening of party politics. Here, distinctive philosophies of liberty and equality would serve as ideological compass needles that

would help actors define new political agendas. Elections would serve partly as tools for realizing those agendas.

Korea's lack of any substantive theory of democracy or alternative philosophies of governance partly explains its loss of political direction after 1987. Before 1987, Koreans viewed democracy as little more than free and fair presidential elections. What really needs explanation, then, is not the instability of party politics after the consolidation of electoral democracy but how that shallow concept of democracy came to constrain political choice before 1987 and then drive the country's political history toward that decisive transitional year. Even during the years of authoritarian rule, democracy's status as Korea's state ideology was never challenged. Dictators found themselves in the awkward position of justifying authoritarian rule in terms of political expediency, identifying it as a temporary measure for building a socioeconomic foundation for electoral democracy.

The ideal of democracy derived its power from both historical and cultural factors. A product of U.S. foreign policy and a child of conflict with communism,¹⁵ Korea embraced democracy as its state ideology not because of a belief in the intrinsic ideological superiority of democracy but because of an acute sense of military insecurity and political vulnerability. There was no alternative. An explicit rejection of democracy would have left Korea with neither a national identity nor a foreign patron. The ruling elites of Korea in essence embraced democracy on pragmatic grounds as an instrument for national survival.

This functional understanding of democracy had perverse consequences for Korean politics. A concept that had no substantive philosophical meaning was suddenly placed on an altar; as a result, Korea suffered from a McCarthyism of its own, in which any criticism of capitalism and democracy was condemned as a subversive act aiding North Korea. Social criticism was repressed. The conceptualization of everyday concerns in terms of philosophical issues of liberty and equality was discouraged. The word "democracy" became a shallow absolute, lying beyond social criticism and political questioning.

The struggle for national survival was in itself a powerful force in politics. Yet its consequences would have been far less sweeping had it not been for a cultural tradition that emphasized the transformation of practical concerns into a system of philosophical beliefs. This tradition included Confucianism, but went beyond it. Shamanism made gods into mere instruments of earthly needs, while legalism defined politics simply as the art of maintaining social order.¹⁶ Korea had been a land of pragmatism well before 1948. And this tradition of pragmatism prepared the country to live on a functionalist diet after it found itself in a crisis of survival in 1945.

Confucianism as a system of *ethical* principles also bolstered Korea's rhetoric of democracy. While Korea at first accepted democracy as a

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mere tool for national survival, this functional justification was joined and later replaced by another kind of rationale, the product of a syncretic transformation of traditional concepts. That is, civil society slowly began to interpret modern political issues of legitimacy through what was already familiar—Confucian moralism—and in the process transformed the concept of democracy understood as free and fair elections into an *ethical* principle. Two key traditional concepts strengthened electoral democracy. The Confucian norm of *minbon* held that all power and authority was derived from and based on the masses. Meanwhile, the principle of *wimin* called for state elites to pursue the public interest and serve the people.¹⁷ In Korea's Confucian discourses, the source and beneficiary of state power were identical. The public had vested power in state elites for its own interest and expected state power to be used to construct a just and prosperous society. Herein lay a new basis for democracy in Confucian Korea. The regime of free and fair elections slowly became a modern extension of the traditional ethical principles of *minbon* and *wimin*. The modern word "democracy" acquired a moralistic undertone, while the traditional ideas of *minbon* and *wimin* became a normative basis for modern electoral politics.

Korea had embraced democracy in its own distinctive way. The modern concept of liberty as it first appeared in the social contractarianism of Western Europe rested on a peculiarly individualist ontology. The Korean people, however, rejected that view of man and instead strove to build democracy on the Korean doxa of Confucianism. This partial and selective process of Westernization both advanced and hindered democracy in Korea. The regime of electoral politics took root in Korea as its people came to define free elections as a moral imperative, a concrete application of the traditional concepts of *minbon* and *wimin*. Yet Korea remained a society without structural or ideological bases to organize politics and transform elections into a contest of ideas and values, precisely because of the Confucian heritage that allowed Koreans to understand democracy as the building of "a government of the people, for the people."

Consequently, once Korea institutionalized a system of direct presidential election in 1987 and restored civilian supremacy five years later, political society lost its sense of direction. There was no place for it to turn in order to develop a new agenda and form a new mission. The concept of democracy as reinterpreted by Korea was primarily a procedural notion and could not function as a source of ideas. While electoral democracy became consolidated, progress toward a deeper and more institutionalized system of organizing and aggregating conflicting interests and ideas stalled. The consolidation of electoral democracy has thus coincided with chaos in party politics. The old cleavage of democracy and development disappeared, while no new line of ideological or interest conflict was drawn between major political forces.

Consequently, the centrifugal force of factionalism was freed of all political constraints and came to dominate party politics.

The Contradiction of Korean Party Politics

In 1987, Korea found itself at a decisive moment in its history. With the transition to electoral democracy, a new political horizon opened up. Yet the party system was incapable of meeting the challenge of transforming electoral democracy into a more responsive and participatory regime. While new actors entered the political arena, parties remained weak and shallow, unable to formulate a coherent program of state policies from the often contradictory demands of social actors. Party politics, in fact, lost its substantive policy content and became a mere game of Machiavellian power politics dominated by a few personalities. Bosses used party politics as an instrument of personal ambition and opted for mergers or breakups whenever they were expedient. Ironically, the journey toward electoral democracy coincided with further institutional decay of party politics.

With both religion and Marxism banished from politics and the cleavage between democracy and development softened, it became Confucianism that supplied key organizing principles of party politics after 1987. School ties remained important for cultivating social bonds among Korea's political elites. Meanwhile, regional ties—which had been partially submerged by the democracy-development cleavage—now fully surfaced and became the preeminent line of cleavage in party politics.

Prior to 1987, regionalism only fostered factionalism within parties. That is, a party boss would typically build a dense interpersonal network of patron and client relations around his home province and use it as a springboard to the construction of an internally cohesive faction of his own within a political party. He would, however, respect interparty differences with respect to the issue of democracy versus development and prevent intraparty factional rivalries from escalating to the point of breaking up the party. The disappearance of the line of substantive political cleavage after 1987 provoked an extensive realignment of political and social forces around regionalist sentiments. Kim Dae Jung broke his uneasy alliance with Kim Young Sam and transformed his Honam faction into the PDP. The main opposition party (NKDP), now left with only Kim Young Sam's supporters (themselves recruited primarily from Kyongnam province), transformed itself into a new party (the Unification Democratic Party) in 1987. What had been a major basis of factional politics before 1987 became the central constitutive principle of political parties after 1987.

Regionalism in Korea did not, however, provide fertile ground for developing modern party politics. The problem was generic. Korean regionalism arose from Confucian familism. That source, however,

delegitimated its own product by positing the existence of a larger circle of familial bonds that transcends and dissolves regionalism. This outer rim was national consciousness (*minjok*). For ethnic nationalism, regionalism was only a cause of unproductive internal discords and

Korea's political parties were utterly unable to develop a viable new "software" for running the "hardware" instituted since 1982.

fissures. The culture of Confucian familism had, in other words, entrapped individuals in an internally contradictory identity. A voter would expand his circle of identity from narrow blood or school ties toward broader regionalist sentiments when forced to make a choice among candidates in elections. The act of voting based on regionalist sentiments was, however, judged to be illegitimate by the voter himself. For there also existed in his heart ethnic nationalism, which depicted regionalism as an ethically unjustifiable sentiment of prejudice. Korean electoral politics was thus in a peculiar situation after 1987. The political parties stood on culturally illegitimate grounds and were pulled in opposite directions at election time by centrifugal regionalist sentiments and by centripetal passions of ethnic nationalism. All political parties nurtured regionalist networks of support. But none defended it as a legitimate principle of political organization. Everyone, in fact, demanded an end to regionalism.

Regionalism in Korea also featured another peculiarity. Party votes in certain plural societies of Western Europe also tended to be unevenly distributed across regions. "Regionalism" there, however, merely reflected religious or class conflicts that by chance overlapped with territorial zones, as the people of a similar religious or class background formed a subsociety in a particular region and led a life insulated from other subsocieties of different religious denomination or class background. In such an internally compartmentalized plural society, regionalism had policy substance as well as organizational cohesiveness. Each distinctive religious group or class in a region would have a particular political party as its spokesman in electoral politics and supply it with both a political agenda and mass electoral machines.¹⁸ Korea was a different historical case. The anthropocentric cultural milieu of Confucian familism and Korea's history of bloody class conflicts before 1953 had deprived both Marxism and religion of mobilizational power and ideological potential. The regionalism of Korea was strictly a Confucian cultural phenomenon. It was an amorphous sentiment of belonging, with neither a specific program of policy action nor a sophisticated network of mass organization.

Herein lies the great misfortune of party politics in Korea since 1987. The formal framework of electoral democracy became consolidated. But

its political parties were utterly unable to develop a viable new "software" for running the "hardware" instituted since 1987. The political parties were in fact formed around an organizational principle with neither ideological legitimacy nor policy substance: the Confucian-based sentiments of regionalism. Thus began a new era of political alienation. The project of democratization was threatened with bankruptcy.

NOTES

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11. Yu Dong Sik, *Minsok jongkyowa hankuk munhwa* (Native religions and Korean culture) (Seoul: Hyundae sasangsa, 1978); Choi Gil Sung, *Hankuk musokron* (Shamanism of Korea) (Seoul: Hyungsol chulpansa, 1981).
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TAIWAN'S UNIQUE CHALLENGES

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On 23 March 1996, the 14 million voters of the Republic of China on Taiwan went to the polls to cast ballots in their first-ever popular presidential election. At the same time, 150,000 troops belonging to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) were massed less than two hundred miles away across the Formosa Strait, preparing for live-ammunition maneuvers—including missile tests. With the world's attention focused on the troubled strait, the vote in Taiwan suddenly took on a new level of global significance. Yet neither the flash of PLA shells nor the vapor trails of missiles should be allowed to obscure the remarkable features of Taiwan's democratic transition or the serious obstacles that Taiwan faces in seeking to consolidate its new democracy.

Though it occurred at about the same time as a global crisis of authoritarianism and concurrent movement toward democracy, Taiwan's democratic transition is distinctive in at least five respects. First, regime transition in Taiwan has meant not redemocratization but democratization "from scratch." Taiwan is a society with no prior democratic experience. Its history has been one of imperial control, colonial administration, and one-party authoritarian rule.¹ It has lacked the institutions—a free press, an independent judiciary, autonomous civic associations—required for liberal democracy. Hardly any members of the three national representative bodies had to face reelection for three decades: Martial law was in effect for almost four decades. The Kuomintang (KMT) party-state maintained a corporatist grip on society. Therefore, from the very beginning, the opposition faced grave difficulties in building support for