

Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis will explore regime changes in South Korea during the 1980s and their meaning for Korean democracy. There were three opportunities for the Korean people to make the transition to democracy during the 1980's: the one was in 1980, the second was in 1986, and the third was in 1987. Although the Korean people aspired and attempted to realize democracy, they only attained a transition to civilian rule in 1987. When the Korean people made this transition, many experts proclaimed it as a victory for democracy. However, later developments in Korea show a different result than what had been expected in 1987. Only after ten years of civilian rule under the Kim Young-Sam government, (the first civilian president elected by direct presidential election since 1953), was legislation passed, for example, allowing workers to participate in politics. Currently, the government is wracked by various corruption scandals and constitutional system is the main point of contention between the government and opposition parties. The current political elites still exclude many popular social movements from most political institutions.

In order to understand this delay in developing democracy, it is necessary to examine the characteristics of the negotiated transition in Korea which was the key turning point for opening up the political system. This negotiation set basic rules and procedures which all of the actors would follow later. This thesis will examine the period between 1980-1987, including three important time periods in 1980, in 1986, and in 1987. It will focus on the different dynamic interactions between the major political actors which resulted in different institutional pacts, and it will reconsider the current political stagnation in Korea that has delayed the establishment of substantive democracy.

In addition, this thesis will argue against other understandings of the transition to democracy. The Korean case has different characteristics which do not fit other theoretical models (e.g., O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Przeworski, 1986 and 1992; and Huntington, 1993) or capture the whole picture of democratization in Korea. By exploring these differences, I would like to complement the negotiated transition model with a mediated negotiation model (e.g., Zartman and Touval, 1985; Touval 1985; and Zartman 1995). Thus the main tasks of this thesis will be first, to show what creates different outcomes in the democratization process at three important periods; second, to explain how certain characteristics are unique to the Korean democratic transition; and third, to define what theoretical frameworks can capture these unique characteristics.

The Negotiated Transition Model vs. the Mediated Negotiation Model

Many theorists (e.g., O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Przeworski, 1986 and 1992; and Huntington, 1993) adopt an actor-oriented approach in explaining the transition to democracy.¹ They

¹All these theorists use the concept of democracy to mean procedural democracy. According to Robert Dahl a democracy --or polyarchy--is a system of government that meets three essential conditions: fair, regular, competitive and meaningful elections for all effective positions of government; a highly inclusive level of political

focus on the strategies, beliefs, and calculations of the elite leaders who lead the democratization at critical junctures. They believe that objective conditions such as degree of economic development and power of the state are correlated with democratization, but these conditions can not explain why democratization is possible at certain points or why sometimes at certain points it fails. According to these theorists, it is necessary to evaluate the actors' strategic choices under these conditions and their joint interactions to know why democratization failed in one case or succeeded in another case.

According to these theorists, an authoritarian regime liberalizes its control over a society due to the emergence of reformers in the regime. Since these incumbent reformers believe that continuing their strong dictatorship will not help them maintain power or improve the regime's legitimacy, the reformers try to bolster their legitimacy by adopting liberalization policies. However, the results of opening society create different unanticipated outcomes and provide groups in civil society with an opportunity to mobilize their members. The results of democratization then depend on the joint interaction of these major actors. Although the theorists argue that social movements become active in the process of democratization, they do not elaborate how the social movements' strategies influence the interactions of the other actors. Instead, they mainly focus on the choices, calculations, and strategic behavior of the elite -- both in the regime and the opposition groups.

These theorists assume there are four major actors in the transition game: hard-liners and softliners in the authoritarian regime, as well as moderates and radicals in the opposition. According to Samuel P. Huntington, there are three different types of transition: transformation, replacement, and transplacement.² He states that transformation is possible when "the elites in power took [take] the lead in bring about democracy." In other words, the authoritarian regime itself (mostly reformers within the regime) play a major role in making transition possible. Replacement occurs when "opposition took [takes] the lead in bringing about democracy, and the authoritarian regime collapses [collapsed] or is [was] overthrown." Lastly, transplacement occurs when "democratization results [resulted] largely from joint action by government and opposition group."³ Transplacement is a type of transition in which the opposition and the regime adopt a strategy of negotiation.

The major actors in transplacement are the reformers in the authoritarian regime and the moderates in the opposition bloc. The success of transplacement depends on the capability of the reformers and the moderates to control the hardliners in the authoritarian regime and the radicals in the opposition bloc. According to Huntington, a successful transplacement occurs when "the dominant groups in both government and opposition" realize that "they are [were] incapable of

participation in the selection of leaders and policies; and civil and political liberties such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and the freedom to form and join organizations. Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 3-20.

²Although they did not specify the name O'Donnell and Schmitter suggested two non-revolutionary transitions in their work: transition from above and transition by negotiation. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transition from Authoritarian Rule* 4 vols (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 37. I will use Huntington's terms in this thesis.

³Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 114.

unilaterally determining the nature of the future of political system in their society.”⁴ Both sides can not realize this fact at the outset of the transition. Initially, the regime believes that it could control or oppress the opposition effectively. However, when the opposition mobilizes people and becomes strong enough to threaten the regime, the situation changes. In this case, the regime needs to decide either to take a risk and oppress the opposition or to negotiate with the opposition to draw up a new political pact. Similarly, the opposition needs to believe that it can overthrow the regime with its mass mobilizations. Therefore, before a successful negotiation between the regime and the opposition, both need to experience a tug-of-war situation which cannot result in a revolution or the regime’s unilateral victory. Obviously, there should be a rough equality in power between the regime and the opposition. As Huntington points out, there should be “a seesawing back and forth of strikes, protests, and demonstrations, on the one hand, and repression, jailing, police violence, states of siege, and martial law, on the other.”⁵ With this stalemate situation, in which “the opposition could mobilize support; the government contain and withstand opposition pressure” transplacement can occur.⁶

In this situation, the existence of leaders who are willing to take risks to negotiate is critical. Division within the regime among its “colleagues and circumstances” may force “the top leaders to negotiate with the opposition.”⁷ At the same time, the opposition leader should control the radicals. If the regime controls professional military and other state offices, the regime can decide the path and speed of democratization.⁸

This model can explain some cases. If there is another important actor who can influence the strategies, however, other interests and calculations need to be included in these dynamics of interaction. In addition, the rigidity of this model is problematic. The model assumes four major actors and divisions within each bloc, which does not fit the Korean case. Thus, another model must be applied--or the mediated negotiation model--to complement these limitations in the negotiated transition mode.

The basic logic of strategic action among the regime’s actors is still relevant. However, the influence of a third party cannot be fully captured with the model of two-party negotiation. If a third party also has an interest in resolving the confrontation between two adversaries, it will become involved in the dispute. When the two parties are at a stalemate, the third party can break the impasse by using various direct and indirect means, such as encouragement, changing motivations, criticisms, and warnings. As Meyer points out, the mere existence of a third party mediator may positively affect

⁴Ibid., 152. Jung and Shapiro studied the democratization of South Africa using this framework of transplacement. They adopted Huntington’s explanation of transplacement and detailed the process of the interaction between the reformers and the moderates in the South African case. However, they did not try to apply game theoretical explanations since they think the game theoretical design cannot capture the complexity of the actors’ preferences and interests which are changing throughout the democratization process. Courtney Jung and Ian Shapiro, “South Africa’s Negotiated Transition: Democracy, Opposition, and the New Constitutional Order,” *Politics & Society* (September 1995): 267-308.

⁵Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 153.

⁶Ibid., 154.

⁷Ibid., 156.

⁸O’Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, 21.

the outcome of the negotiation.⁹ At the same time, the power and resources of the third party can facilitate negotiation more directly.¹⁰ The effectiveness of the mediation depends on the specific situation and the institutional relationship between the mediator and the adversaries.

By participating in the dispute, the third party changes the bargaining structure from dyadic to triadic. The third party can use its own resources to support one side and restrain the other side, either to induce or maintain stalemate. By doing this, the third party can provide the other actors with a motivation to compromise, rather than pursue unilateral victory. At this point, the third party does not necessarily act as a neutral mediator. As Touval points out, a “biased” mediator can be very effective because of the mediator’s relationship with “the party that considers itself favored by the mediator will seek to preserve its good relation and prevent the coalition between the mediator and the adversary.” On the other hand, “the party that thinks that the mediator is favoring the adversary will attempt to obtain the mediator’s favor.”¹¹ Thus, the mediator’s partiality and asymmetric relationship with the disputants can provide it with critical leverage and facilitate the negotiation between two adversaries.¹² Zartman argues that the conditions under which the third party will be effective in bringing the parties to the negotiation table are simple: the existence of stalemate and presence of responsible representatives of both sides.¹³ With these conditions a third party can successfully mediate the negotiation. In the Korean case, this model fits the events in question much better.

This study, then, will study the major actors in the democratization of Korea: the social movements, the opposition party, the regime, and the United States (U.S.). The roles of these major actors will be followed through three different democratization waves. The social movements become a much more significant actor in the democratization process since they influence the other actors’ choices by organizing popular protests and coordinating collective actions with the opposition party. The failure of the Kwangju movement in 1980 provided the social movements with important lessons. The radicalization of their strategy prevented them from participating in a coalition with the opposition party and led to their isolation in 1985-6. In turn, changes in their strategies affected their

⁹Arthur Meyer, “Function of the Mediator in Collective Bargaining,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (January 1960): 161. Cited in Oran Young, *The Intermediaries: Third Parties in International Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 36.

¹⁰William Zartman and Saadial Touval, “International Mediation: Conflict Resolution and Power Politics,” *Journal of Social Issues* 41, no. 2, 1985: 27-45.

¹¹Saadial Touval, *The Peace Brokers: Mediation in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1979* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 14-16.

¹²Saadial Touval, “The Context of Mediation,” *Negotiation Journal* 1 (October 1985): 375-6. In contrast, Young (1967) suggested that impartiality is an important characteristic of an effective mediator. Munck and Kumar argued that four factors affect the degree of success of mediated negotiation: the number, inclusiveness and cohesion of the parties to the peace accords; the number and interest of external parties; the transitional institutional framework; and the peace signatories’ perceptions of their electoral chances. Gerardo Munck L. and Chetan Kumar, “Civil Conflicts and the Conditions for Successful International Intervention: a Comparative Study of Cambodia and El Salvador,” *Review of International Studies* 21(1995): 159-81.

¹³William Zartman, *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1995), 19.

relationship with the opposition party, and consequently many social movements built a new coalition with the opposition party in 1987. Although the social movements contributed to changing the power balance between the opposition bloc and the ruling bloc through their successful mass mobilizations, their influence decreased in the major political institutions after the initial democratization pact was made.

The Korean case shows that the opposition party in the process of democratization is critical, because it can manage its opportunities strategically in dealing with the social movements as well as with the regime. Although the power of the authoritarian regime is strong enough to overwhelm society, it cannot completely exclude opposition parties from the political arena because the state needs the opposition party to maintain a minimum appearance of formal democracy. To expand its influence and negotiation power, the opposition party used two strategies: negotiation in the national assembly and mobilization of people by taking the issues into the streets. Although the opposition party failed to maintain its position in 1980, it recovered its capacity rapidly with its own struggles and assistance from the social movements during the 1980s. Whenever the opposition party took issues to the streets, it provided the social movements with a political opportunity to organize large masses of people. Eventually, the opposition party's political maneuvering with social movements and the ruling bloc helped Korea make a transition in a nonrevolutionary fashion. Lastly, the U.S. played an important role in Korean democratization, since its involvement in Korean politics, economics, and the military is significant enough to influence the decision-making of other actors in the democratization process. The different reactions of the U.S. are critical for understanding the different results at three important turning points in Korean democratization. Thus, the examination of changing U.S. policy will shed some light on the role of an outside mediator in democratization.

Following this first introductory chapter, the second chapter will cover the aborted attempt at making a transition to democracy in 1979-1980. Its first section will explore the historical context of Korean politics. The second part of the chapter will examine the interests, strategies, and interactions of the major actors in the newly opened political arena. The major actors in this period are the military, the U.S., the interim government, the Democratic Republic party in the ruling bloc, and the New Democratic Party and the social movements in the opposition bloc. In addition, the conditions under which the Kwangju movement occurred and its tragic results will be explored.

The third chapter will cover the period of 1981-87 in which two attempts at making the transition to democracy occurred. The first section of the chapter will address the impact of the Kwangju movement on the strategies and interests of the major actors and the process in which the major actors interacted. Since the first negotiation attempts failed, this section will focus on the reasons why these negotiations went sour. The second part of the chapter will explore the sources, processes, and results of a negotiated transition in 1987. It will focus on how the success of the June movement in 1987 affected the relationships among the major actors. Lastly, this chapter will explore the impact of the negotiated transition on the establishment of democracy by highlighting the role played by the U.S. The final chapter will briefly summarize the discussion in the previous chapters and describe later developments in the delayed democratization of Korea.