

Chapter 4. Conclusion

Why did the attempt to democratize in 1980 fail? First, the objective conditions under which the events occurred were unfavorable for democratization. Internationally, the U.S. faced serious threats from the Iranian revolution in 1978-80 and from the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. These events made the U.S. refuse to accept political instability in Korea. Since Korea is a vital country of major geopolitical importance in resisting communist countries such as the Soviet Union, China, and North Korea, American interests in military security was the top concern in its dealing with South Korea. This atmosphere of cold war confrontation atmosphere was unfavorable when the Yushin regime suddenly collapsed in 1979.

In addition, the economic difficulties which Korea experienced from 1978 to 1980 made the middle classes very cautious about the future. Although the development of the Korean economy allowed the middle classes to become a significant part of the population, the middle classes were basically unorganized. They also feared the possible collapse of the economy if political instability continued.

In the first attempt at making a transition to democracy in 1979-80, there were four major actors: the reformers and hardliners in the regime and the moderates and radicals in the opposition groups. The goal of the reformers was to transfer the power to a civilian government and to create a democratic regime. This group included the softliners within the military and the RDP. The hardliners in the regime opposed the transfer of power to the civilians and to the reform of the authoritarian regime. The young officers led by Chun Doo-Whan were the core of this group. In the opposition bloc, the NDP was a moderate opposition party which wanted to have an opportunity to compete in the elections and obtain power. Its goal was a procedural democracy, not a revolution. In contrast, the social movements especially the student movements, demanded a more rapid transition to, and a guarantee of, substantive democracy.

According to the negotiated transition model, there should be reformers and the moderate opposition as a counter-partner who share an interest in making a transition to democracy for a successful negotiation. Moreover, these two partners should control both the hardliners in the ruling bloc and the radicals in the opposition group. However, in the first wave, the reformers in the ruling bloc lost their control of the hardliners. In contrast, the Chun Doo Hwan group, or the hardliners, defeated the reformers by a coup staged on December 12, 1979. And, the hardliners became a core player in the transition game.

Facing this change, the moderate opposition party had two choices, either to cooperate with the hardliners or to struggle against them by coordinating with the social movements. If the opposition party chose to cooperate with the hardliners, the opposition party would lose the chance to compete in the elections and another authoritarian regime would be established. If the opposition party decided to struggle against the hardliners, it would then cooperate with the social movements. At the same time, however, it could control the social movements when they became radicalized.

First, the NDP failed to maintain its cohesiveness, due to the internal conflicts between Kim Dae Jung and Kim Young Sam factions. These internal struggles undermined the capacity of the

NDP to become a powerful party. Second, the party failed to understand what the center of power was in the ruling bloc. Without figuring out the locus of power, the NDP tried to make a pact with the RDP, which had already lost its capacity as a responsible representative of the ruling bloc when the military hardliners launched the coup. Third, the NDP failed to coordinate with the social movements. As a result, the student movements took on the issues without coordinating with the NDP. The isolated and unorganized protests of the students provided the military with an excuse to intervene in politics. Since the hardliners took power and the moderates in the opposition groups lost their power, negotiations were not possible.

In this situation, under which the hardliners controlled the ruling bloc and the radicals emerged as a major player, only one option was left -- that of physical confrontation between the hardliners and the students and the citizens who wanted to pursue their goals by force. When there were conflicts between the hardliners and the militant oppositions, the U.S. supported the hardliners. Since the power gap between the military and the isolated oppositions in Kwangju was too wide, the hardliners controlled the situation with the military. This event ended the first wave of democratization and the authoritarian regime was reestablished.

The second wave occurred in 1986. At this juncture there were four major actors, the opposition party, the social movements, the regime, and the U.S. The goal of the opposition party was to make the transition to a procedural democracy. The social movements wanted to pursue a revolution. The regime wanted to prolong its power through limited competition. The goal of the U.S. was to gradually progress toward procedural democracy in Korea without any physical confrontations or violence. Despite what the negotiated transition model suggests, there were no practical divisions within the ruling bloc and the reformers did not exist in the regime. However, the regime itself pledged to transfer power peacefully. After successfully coordinating with the social movements, the NKDP emerged as a representative opposition party after the election in 1985. The NKDP then pushed the regime to agree to participate in negotiations to revise the constitution by launching mass mobilizations. The major issue at this point was the shape of the constitution and which governmental system should be adopted for the next regime.

The U.S. urged the regime to participate in the negotiations. Since the U.S. wanted to maintain political stability in Korea, it sought to solve the problem by dialogue and negotiation within the National Assembly. Facing U.S. pressure and the successful mobilization of the NKDP, the regime agreed to participate in the negotiations. However, the situation started to change when the social movements became more radicalized, and the NKDP could not control with them. The social movements pursued revolution and criticized the NKDP for negotiating with the regime. The NKDP severed the relationship with the radicals and returned to the negotiation table.

As the regime successfully repressed the social movements and cut the relationship between the NKDP and the social movements, the regime also maintained superior power over the NKDP in the negotiations. In addition, the NKDP became involved in internal conflicts when Lee Min Woo suggested his own plan for the negotiations. With these events undermining it, the NKDP lost its capacity to pursue its interests in the negotiations. The balance of power changed, favoring the regime. Maintaining superior power over the NKDP, the regime did not change its goal, and it kept delaying until the NKDP was forced to accept the regime's goal. Eventually, the opposition leaders

decided to take the issues to the streets. Simultaneously, the regime believed that it could contain these mass mobilizations by force. As the model has suggested, if there was no stalemate between the regime and the opposition party, negotiation would be impossible. The negotiation failed.

The negotiation was successful during the third wave in 1987. The objective conditions under which the major actors' choices occurred were favorable for the transition to a procedural democracy. Internationally, tensions between the Soviet Union and the U.S. decreased due to the emergence of Gorbachev. With the new mood of détente during 1985-1987, the U.S. fear of communism decreased. By that time, many Latin American and European countries also were experiencing a democratic transition. Under these conditions, the Reagan administration changed its policy from absolute support for any authoritarian pro-Western regime in Third World to one of selective support. Internally, the economy in this period also was strong, and this was an important reason that the regime was able to maintain its confidence in dealing with the opposition party.

There were the same major actors as in the second wave in 1986, but there was an important change in the strategy of the social movements. Owing to their isolation from people and repression by the regime, the social movements changed their strategy to one of revolution. Unless they coordinated with the opposition party, they could not successfully mobilize people. The success of these mass mobilizations, however, changed the strategies of the regime and the U.S.

Facing such successful mass mobilizations, the regime had two choices, either to accept the demands of the opposition or to use the military to quell the mobilization. If the regime chose the first option, the regime would have to compete with the opposition party in the election. If the regime chose the second option, the regime would have to face one of three possibilities -- a military coup, a civil war, or a repressive quelling of the masses. All of these outcomes would seriously hurt its legitimacy.

At this time, the choices the U.S. had were important since they could change the balance of power by incorporating the CFC structure and other diplomatic means. Since the goal of the U.S. in Korea was to maintain political stability and make a gradual progress toward procedural democracy, the U.S. urged the regime not to use the military to quell the mass protests during the June movement. With this measure, the U.S. contributed to a stalemate between the opposition groups and the regime. Then, the U.S. contacted both the opposition leaders and the regime to mediate the opinions and interests of each side. As an articulate mediator who had a strong motivation to maintain stability in Korea, the U.S. played an important role in encouraging both sides to participate in the negotiations.

Faced with this situation, the regime calculated the possible costs of their available choices. Since the U.S. and the higher military command so strongly opposed using troops, the regime would risk a military coup or a civil war if it mobilized the military to quell the mass mobilizations. This cost was much higher than the cost of accepting the demands of the opposition when the regime calculated their probability of winning in any election. Its chances of winning were good, due to the many divisions within the opposition party. Moreover, the regime could still assume a better position than the opposition in the negotiation since the regime would not lose any of its institutional benefits if it accepted the demands of the opposition. Thus the regime chose to accept the demands of the opposition. The major issue--direct presidential elections--was solved before the opening of the

practical negotiations. The third wave for democratization in 1987 in Korea was successful, then, due to successful mass mobilization and the mediation of the U.S.

This Korean case study reveals some differences which do not fit into the negotiated transition model. First, unlike the negotiated transition framework, the social movements, or the radicals in Korea, changed their strategies during the transition process. Although they might not have changed their final goal, they changed their strategies and cooperated with the moderate opposition party. Although the negotiated transition model, which is based on an actor-oriented approach, can contribute to understanding joint interactions between the major actors and the timing of transitions, its rigid framework assumes that the four major actors cannot make these changes.

Another question was raised in the configuration of the major actors. The negotiated transition framework assumed a major division within the ruling bloc as a critical condition for making a successful negotiated transition. The major reason why the theorists assumed there should be four actors is due to the assumption that the regime would not accept a liberalization policy without internal conflicts between the reformers and the hardliners. Since this assumption was deduced from empirical cases, it may not work in some cases, like Korea's, where there was no practical division in the regime. As Przeworski later notes, the regime could accept a liberalization policy without experiencing internal division.¹ The Korean case showed how the regime could accept a liberalization policy by itself. In this case, the configuration of the four majors are not the necessary conditions for a negotiated transition. As Huntington argues, the regime itself changed its policy for various reasons.² If these options exist, there is no need to make an artificial division of four actors to explain the interactions of the actors. Without division in the regime, it still was possible to make a negotiated transition.³

¹ He originally argued that there would be no liberalization without internal division in the ruling bloc. The reason he took this stance was that the mass mobilizations by the social movements could not force the regime which maintained the military and other appellates to change its policy. See Adam Przeworski, "Some Problems in the Study of the Transition to Democracy," in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transition from Authoritarian Rule* vol 3 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 56. However, he changed this position in a later article. Adam Przeworski, "The Games of Transition," in *Issues in Democratic Consolidation: The New South American Democracies in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell and J. Samuel Valenzuela (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 108. He states that "liberalization is a result of interaction between splits within the authoritarian regime and autonomous organization of the civil society."

² Huntington used the government as a united actor in his explanation of the interactions of the major actors in the transplacement. However, he returned to his original position when he suggested some advice for the major actors in making a successful negotiated transition. I think he does not take this problem seriously, or forgot what he mentioned before. See Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 151-162.

³ Im Hyug Baeg, who used game theoretical framework to explain Korean democratization case, accepted this framework and argued that there was a practical division within the regime. However, as it shown in chapter three of this study there was no practical division. The power struggle between Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo group broke out after this transition game when the Roh government tried to sacrifice Chun group under the pressure of the opposition parties after the failure of the general election in 1988. The memoir of Chun showed how the regime made a decision based on its strategic calculations without experiencing the internal division. There is one part which is demonstrating how even the officials in the government did not notice the fact that Chun himself initiated the June

Lastly, the negotiated transition framework needs to be complemented when a third party plays an important role in the negotiation process, as in the Korean case. Since the negotiated transition framework assumed two major parties at the final negotiation table, it had limitations in elaborating the dynamics of any negotiation including a third party. By using the mediation framework, the role of the U.S. can be captured in the process of transition. In addition, the mediation framework did not assume four major actors, it could not explain the interactions with a third party. In sum, the negotiated transition model could capture the nuances of the Korean case, but the case showed different configurations among the major actors which the framework could not capture. In order to complement this limitation, the mediation framework was used here, and it better explained the role of the U.S.

Some Prospects for Consolidation of Democracy in Korea

After the election in 1987, the democratization process in Korea has experienced many unstable fluctuations. Although Roh Tae Woo became president in 1988 with 34% of the total vote, the regime suffered a serious setback in the general elections of 1988. In this election, the opposition parties became major players in democratization. For the first time in Korean history, the opposition parties maintained a majority in the National Assembly. Support for the opposition parties was completely based on each leaders' region. From that time on, regionalism emerged as a dominant factor in Korean politics. Kim Young Sam came from the Southeast (Kyungsang Namdo and Pusan), Kim Dae Jung from the Southwest (Chunlanamdo, Chulabukdo, and Kwangju), Kim Jong Pil from the Midwest (Chungchung do), and Roh Tae Woo from the Mideast (Kyungsang Bukdo and Taegu). The regime tried to use regionalism to divide the opposition parties in the presidential election in 1987. However, this strategy trapped it in the general election in 1988. In the negotiations for the election, the regime accepted the demands for a single-member district instead of a double-member district which was used under the Chun regime. This rule benefitted the opposition party, which maintained strong support in each region. Owing to this double-edged regionalism, the DJP failed to maintain itself as a ruling party in the National Assembly. One group in the social movements participated in the election with its own candidate but failed to obtain a seat. In contrast, the members of the social movements who joined the Peace Reunification Democratic Party, one opposition party led by Kim Dae Jung, won in the election. Since regionalism was a major factor in deciding the voters' preference, the influence of the social movements decreased significantly from 1988.

The regime then fell into a defensive position in its relationship with the opposition parties. The opposition parties demanded hearings for investigations of wrongdoing during the Chun regime and the Kwangju uprising. Facing threats from the opposition parties, the Roh regime tried to sever

29th declaration plan. The official showed strong complaints about the fact that Roh did not confer before he made a decision on the declaration. As this episode demonstrated the plan was made under a secret plan to undermine the opposition and improve Roh's image fully. See Chun's memoir. Song-Ik Kim, "Chun Doo Hwan yksarul wihan jungun 1" [Chun Doo Hwan, the Real Testimony for the History 1], *Wolgan Choson* (January 1992): 381-96.

its connection with the Chun regime from which it began. Although there were several internal conflicts, members of Chun groups, who retired from politics and who lost much of their power already, had no choice but to accept this punishment. Since the opposition parties did not want to sacrifice their participation in politics, they did not push the Roh regime to punish the Chun groups more fully. Although there were some incidents over complaints from the military hard-liners, Roh managed to control the military during this period. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the improvement of relationships with Eastern Europe and China mitigated the anti-communism sentiments of the regime and in the military. At the same time, the regime did repress the social movements.

In order to break this balance of power, the Roh regime initiated another pact, or a grand compromise, with two other opposition parties, the Democratic Party of Kim Young Sam and the Democratic Republic Party of Kim Jong Pil in 1990. This merging of parties resulted in the isolation of Kim Dae Jung and his base, Honam region, in Korean politics. In the 1992 election, the progressive party, which was organized by the social movement sectors, again completely failed to obtain a seat. People voted based on regionalism except in Seoul. Since the conservative parties still blocked the possibility of workers participating in politics collectively, there was no ground for the progressive groups to use to win in the election. With the regime's harsh repression, the labor movement also decreased significantly after 1989.

In contrast, the power of the bourgeoisie started to increase. Eventually, Chung Ju Young, the owner of Hyundai chaebol, organized his own party, the National Party, in 1992, to participate in the general election. The NP managed to obtain a significant number of seats and emerged as a second opposition party. In addition, Chong Ju Young ran for president in 1993. Although he lost and subsequently dissolved the NP, this event clearly demonstrated the power of the bourgeoisie. Kim Young Sam managed to become president with the assistance of Roh in the 1993 election. He launched sweeping new reform projects from the beginning of his regime. To break up the military factions which were major power sources for Chun and Roh, Kim Young Sam punished the clique "Hanohoe (one circle)" and installed his officers, mostly originally from his region. He also enacted "the real name system" to clear up and prevent financial corruption. However, he faced serious counter-attacks from the conservative camp within his party and from business people. Since he allied himself with the DJP, he had difficulties in controlling them. Eventually, he retreated from his original plan and started to compromise with the conservative camps. Cornered by the attacks of the opposition parties and by the failure of the local government elections in 1995, Kim Young Sam decided to arrest Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo in 1996 for mutiny, treason, and acceptance of kickbacks. Although Kim Young Sam recovered his popularity for a short time with this measure, he is still in danger because of concern over his campaign fund.

Regarding the social movements, the Kim Young Sam regime changed its policy on workers in 1997, after the workers went on strike demanding revisions of labor laws which prohibited third-party intervention, the unions' political participation, and the organization of multi-unions in a single work place. The opposition parties and the regime negotiated to allow the unions' participation in politics and multi-unions to organize in a single work place in February, 1997. With this measure, the unions now can participate in politics. It will contribute to rearranging the political landscape in

Korea, but other election laws still need to be changed in support of the progressive party.

Korean politics has progressed toward democracy very slowly with many abnormalities: only after ten years were the workers been allowed to participate in politics. Yet, to satisfy minimal conditions for a procedural democracy, it is necessary to guarantee equal opportunity for all social movements. Without institutionalizing participation by the social movements in politics, the guarantee of representation of various interests, cannot be met. Only regionalism will prevail in Korean politics without more policy-and ideology-based parties. Other substantive reforms, which will guarantee economic equality and freedom of organization are also necessary for the establishment of democracy. Without these efforts, the development of Korean democracy will be even slower and will be difficult. In view of possible reunification in the near future with North Korea, regionalism could become a major obstacle to democracy. In addition, the guarantee of political participation of the social movements is necessary to secure fair elections and the accountability of political representatives, which also are minimal criteria for attaining a procedural democracy.