

A New Phase of Democratization in South Korea--- Transformation of Political Culture Symbolized by Impeachment of President Roh Moo Hyun

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Until the Soviet Union was dissolved, the greatest concerns of social science, especially, political science, had been matters concerning transformation from a capitalistic system to the socialist system. Since the Soviet Union was dismantled, however, the Marxism, which was believed to have “scientifically” proven that a socialist society would take over a capitalistic system “in the course of nature”, has lost its authority in the field of social science. We have not heard for a long time a “grand story” about other alternatives to a capitalistic system.

Before the inauguration of the second term of President of George W. Bush on January 20, 2005, Condoleezza Rice, the Secretary of State designate, upheld as one of external policies of the United States to “spread freedom and democracy all over the globe” at the confirmation hearing at the Senate on January 18. She defined the target areas as “the outposts of tyranny” and named six countries: Cuba, Burma, North Korea, Iran, and Zimbabwe. All these countries have an authoritarian and oppressive regime, crack down on dissidents and pro-democracy activists in the country, and violate human rights. Some of these countries are trying to mitigate the popular discontent by invading a neighboring country or suppressing minority groups within the country. Thus, these are possible sources of a regional conflict in a mid and long term. That is a perception held by the U.S. Dr. Rice pointed to an authoritarian (dictatorial or oppressive) regime as a disruption to international peace and order under the leadership of the U.S. Under such a regime, among the three principles constituting a modern state, namely, democracy, liberalism, and nationalism, the universal political principles of democracy and liberalism are not adopted as principles constituting a state.

Since the 1960's, putting aside issues concerning transformation to a socialist system, the greatest challenge of American modern political science has been the same issue that Dr. Rice pointed to, namely, “transformation from an authoritarian regime to a democratic system”. That is to say, how to democratize an authoritarian regime. That is why the political development theory, which measures the degree of transformation of an authoritarian regime to a democracy in the scale with the U.S. at the democratic end, and the comparative study of politics have become popular in American modern political science. Robert Dahl defined Polyarchy as a “liberal democratic system” of the U.S. that is the goal to be achieved. He listed seven institutional conditions as conditions for a democracy to be established and function in his book titled “Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition” published in 1971. In “On Democracy” published in 1998, 27 years later, he listed the following six: ① Elections of public office personnel by citizens, ② free, fair, and frequent elections, ③ freedom of expression, ④ right to access information sources regarding alternatives, ⑤ freedom of association, and ⑥ “comprehensive civil right”, that is, a right of all law-abiding residents to enjoy the abovementioned five rights. R. Dahl advocated in the 1970's the comparative government study, which measures the degree of transformation of an authoritarian/oppressive regime to Polyarchy by how fully the six

or seven institutional conditions are met. Afterward, comparative studies were conducted to measure the degree of democratization of authoritarian regimes mainly in Latin America by the criterion set by R.Dahl.

Moreover, authoritarian regimes in South Korea and Taiwan were turned into democratic governments in the 1980's, the move Huntington dubbed as "The Third Wave". Political scientists got interested in patterns in which transformation was made and the degree to which democracy has consolidated in such countries, including South Korea and Taiwan.

Among the six countries that Dr. Rice named as "the outposts of tyranny", North Korea was created as a product of Cold War division of a country. The other half is indeed South Korea. On the one hand, South Korea somehow succeeded transforming itself to a democracy in the late-1980's and has been so ever since. On the other hand, North Korea has been designated by the U.S. as a target of democratization. The contrast between the two countries' political developments can be seen as an irony of history. South Korea's transformation to a democracy is apparently successful, but at the onset, its conditions were the same as North Korea's. After disarmament of the Japanese military forces on the Korean Peninsula, Korea was divided at a border set by the U.S. and the Soviet Union, that is the latitude 38° N. The North was occupied by the Soviet Union and the South by the U.S. That was a watershed in history on the Korean Peninsula. As the Cold War world order was established, the South was integrated into the "liberal democratic" camp of the U.S. It was build as a divided nation with the name of "Republic of Korea".

The political culture on the Korean Peninsula before that was Confucianist-authoritarian from the Joseon Dynasty era, which lasted about 500 years, as Gregory Henderson, a former U.S. State Department official, said in his book, "Korea: The politics of the Vortex, 1968". The Confucianist authoritarianism is one side of a coin. The other side was manifested as a conflict over "cultural hegemony" of the orthodox interpretation of Confucianism. That is to say, during the Joseon era, values were distributed around the king. Civil and military officials, who distributed values on behalf of the king, were chosen by the Kwageo, a national higher civil service examination made after China's system. Therefore, for about 500 years, on the Korean Peninsula, aspiration for knowledge of those who were qualified to take the national examination driven by ambition to ascend the bureaucratic ladder fiercely intensified. They formed different schools of interpretation of Confucianism (they had a nationwide school system called "Seodang"), with each claiming for orthodoxy. They were engaged in power struggles over hegemony of "orthodox" interpretation of Confucianism, which greatly influenced the trend of the national examination. Consequently, they formed a political culture, in which the governmental post-seekers are forced to be driven into the "vortex" of the power-hegemonic struggle towards Seoul, where the king resided. This Confucianist-authoritarian political culture was mostly contained during the Japanese colonial rule. After the Japanese was defeated, however, it was reactivated. It helped establishment of the autocratic regime of the Kim Il-sung dynasty in the North, while it supported the dictatorship of President Rhee Syng-man and authoritarian rule by the military regimes of Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan in the South.

In addition, South Korea was established as the "nation at the frontline of

anti-communism” under the U.S. protection. Therefore, South Korea adopted anti-communism as its national policy. In analogy to ideological positions of political parties in Japan, all political factions positioned on the left of the rightist Liberal Democratic Party were either prohibited or oppressed. Consequently, far-right politicians took turns to assume state power. The Confucianist-authoritarianism and anti-communism were integrated, forming an authoritarian regime peculiar to South Korea.

Under the developmental dictatorship of the Park Chung-hee military regime, economic development policies somehow started to take effect. In the 1970’, South Korea started taking off for a modern capitalist economy, and accordingly the social structure greatly changed. That is to say, industrialization/urbanization, a process that took over hundred years in Western capitalist countries, proceeded in a compressed form within about 20 years. So rapid was the transformation, the people who were forcefully removed from land and tradition of their ancestors became angry, and enormous energy of resistance built up. With such discontent at the backdrop, power struggles over “cultural hegemony” of “liberal democracy” interpreted in an anti-communist way, which was a driving force of the new “vortex” of political culture, were turned into popular struggles by students who were to be next generation political elites. They called for transformation of the authoritarian regime to a democratic system according to a universal interpretation of liberal democracy. Student-activists upheld a slogan of the “Three People’s Principles” of “Popular Activism, Nationalism, and Democracy”, or “Popular Democracy”. In the 1990’s, they bravely fought against the military authoritarian regime. In the process, they obtained support of the class of modern laborers and the new middle class that had been created by industrialization and urbanization. In 1987, Roh Tae-woo, the then head of the ruling party who was appointed as successor to President Chun, partly pressed by the U.S. call for democratization, and in order to avoid a civil war crisis, was forced to issue a “Declaration of Democratization”. In this way, the foundation of the current democratic system of South Korea was built.

Maybe, I have talked too much about the background, but, in any way, to explore how deeply the democratic system has consolidated in South Korea or Taiwan in the 1990’s and on is of great interest from the political scientific point of view. It is because transformation from an authoritarian regime to a democratic system, in a broader timeframe, after the French Revolution, where internal and external political conditions were ripe for, took place one after another across the globe. That is to say, the U.K., France, and the U.S. established modern nation-states through autonomous civil revolutions. One hundred years later, emulating them, Germany, Japan, and Italy tried to establish modern states. After World War II, colonies that suffered under the imperialist rule were liberated. Some of the former colonies succeeded in transition from authoritarian rule to a democratic system. However, they were done forcefully, not autonomously. Therefore, the transition to a democratic system incurred many difficulties. Many of countries even failed and retreated to an authoritarian regime or anarchism.

Looking back, we will find some patterns of success and failure of transformation from an authoritarian regime to a democratic system in the 20th century. A typical pattern of failure is the Weimar Republic. There are two possible reasons why the

Weimar Republic failed. First, democracy was brought about from the outside by the defeat in World War I and a revolution. So, there were few political parties aiming at realizing democracy, or if any, they were very weak. Secondly, political culture against democracy, especially the one of nationalistic nature, which opposed democracy and liberalism, was strong. On the other hand, the post-war Japan is an example of successful introduction of democracy from the outside. However, if we look at how deeply democracy has taken root in the post-war Japan, we will see that in a sense, a political culture that had affinity to democracy had existed before World War II, and that the culture was reinforced after the war. However, an old political culture that opposes that political culture is now regaining ground, which is becoming an issue in Japan.

South Korea transformed itself to a democratic system in the 1980's. In an aspect, it was induced by an outside influence of "The Third Wave", but mostly it was of the autonomous nature. It can safely be said that institutional conditions for Polyarchy that R.Dahl laid were there in South Korea. Such institutional/functional conditions require establishment of a new political culture with affinity to democracy as a precondition. That is proved by the failed Weimar Republic and the successful post-war Japan. I have been interested in how deeply democracy has consolidated in South Korea and Taiwan over the past decade and tracked developments there. For every general election, I conducted a fixed-point research in the field for both countries. Recently, funded by the Center for the study of International Comparative Politics(Daitoubunka University) I visited South Korea and observed South Korea enter a new phase of democratization. The following is what I found there.

Kim Dae-jung, an opposition candidate, was elected as president at the end of 1997, which was an event that met the condition ① for Polyarchy according to R.Dahl. At the end of 2000, the current President Roh Moo -hyun was elected, which brought South Korea to a new level of a democratic system. Before and after Kim Dae-jung took power in 1998, anti-communist elements were relegated to the insignificant influence. Freedom of political speech was realized, allowing the people to read "The Capital" by Marx and "The Complete Works of Lenin" as they liked. In this way, objective conditions to form a political will that nearly match those in the Western industrialized countries were met. As mentioned earlier, there were students who fought against the military regime under the slogan of "Popular Activism, Nationalism, and Democracy" without the anti-communist ideology. The leaders of such students have formed a new generation of politicians and emerged in the political scene. They are called the "368 generation" because they were born in the 1960's, went to college in the 1980's, and now in their late-30's or 40's. Some of them have joined the existing political parties; others have started organizing and leading grass-root civil and social movements aiming at establishing a western-style civil society. Concurrently, an IT revolution took place in South Korea, helping the new democratic civil culture rapidly spreading across the country. The 1998 general election was a manifestation of such a development. In the general election, civil movements to remove politically corrupt, old-fashioned, anti-communist, and authoritarian lawmakers spread to all over the country. Consequently, many old-fashioned lawmakers lost their seats in parliament. After the election, the new generation claimed that a primary election should be conducted in order to nominate

candidates to parliament in emulation of the U.S. democratic system. Pressed by such a public opinion, the existing political parties had no other choice than to introduce a U.S.-style primary election system. As a result, in the presidential election held toward the end of 2002, Roh Moo -hyun, a former lawyer who fought for democratization against the military regime of Chun Doo-hwan , was elected

As a symbol of transformation from the authoritarian regime to a democratic system according to the 1987 “Declaration of Demoralization” by Roh Tae-woo, the newly-established Constitution has introduced a semi-presidential system. The Constitution stipulates that terms of presidential office is five years, and that terms of parliamentary office is four year. The latest presidential election was held toward the end of 2002, and the latest parliamentary election was in April 2004. Therefore, Roh Moon-hyun, who was inaugurated as president in January 2003, landed himself in confrontation with parliament dominated by the powerful opposition party, Grand National Party called “Han-nara-dang”, which was the mainstream ruling party during the military regime. Roh Moo -hyun, who ventured to carry out such policies as to help the new political culture thrive, collided head-on with the opposition party which had overwhelming power. At the end of 2003, a motion to impeach the president was adopted at parliament based on an allegation that the president had received illegal political funding from the business community. In South Korea, as mentioned earlier, it was the military regime that initiated the rapid economic growth under development dictatorship policy. Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan, dictators of the military regime, collected huge sum of illegal funding from the business community and used the money to bribe parliamentarians. Thus, they could pretend that the South Korean political system was that of representative democracy. The bad custom of political corruption was a malady inherent to the political culture of Confucianist-authoritarianism. Such a political culture has persisted even after ROK was established. Roh Moo -hyun was also involved in accepting illegal money in raising the fund for election campaigns. The opposition party employed a tactic of seeking impeachment of the president to attack the government. The impeachment motion passed the parliament, and Roh Moo -hyun was forced to suspend performing his duties. In response to that, the new “386 generation” in support of Roh Moon-hyun carried out a nationwide civil movement to criticize the impeachment bid by the opposition Grand National Party. The civil movement developed as electoral campaign for the generation election which started in late-March. Consequently, the latest general election had a reinforcing effect of the democratic nature of South Korea politics. At the same time, it was like a litmus test to see whether a political culture with affinity to democracy would take root in society. The outcome of the election was that a newly established “Open Uri Party” in support of the new political culture won support of many people and secured a majority in parliament. In this way, South Korea has entered a new phase of democratization.

I made a one-week visit to South Korea at the end of March last year before the general election campaign started. I conducted “participant observations” to “candle meetings” of citizens of the two major cities, Seoul and Pusan, who opposed the impeachment motion presented by the opposition party. I also had opportunities to interview Prof. Hahm Sung-deuk at Koryo University, a leading scholar in the field of the study on the South Korean presidential system, and Prof. Park Kwan-ju at Pusan

University, an expert of South Korean politics. Prof. Hahm of Koryo University remarked as follows: In early-1993, a civil government of Kim Yong-sum was established, which marked the beginning of transformation from an authoritarian regime to a democratic system. The process was completed with the victory of Kim Dae-jung, who ran as opposition candidate, in the presidential election in late-1997, with which the conditions for Polyarchy were somehow fulfilled. However, even during the Kim Yong-sum and Kim Dae-jung administrations, the president-centered autocratic system from the period of President Rhee Syng-man was there to stay. It is because the president accepted huge sum of political funding from the business community and used the money to fully control parliament by exerting the right to nominate parliamentary candidates as head of the ruling party. Therefore, both Presidents Kim Yong-sum and Kim Dae-jung maintained the long-standing custom of assuming the presidency as king, that is to say, the position as head of the ruling party that collected large amount of political funding from the business community and used the money to control the parliament. However, once Roh Moo -hyun was elected as president, the situation changed. It is because all conditions that supported the presidency as king disappeared. Namely, the new generation introduced a primary election system for presidential and parliamentary candidates. After the impeachment bid of the president, obtaining illegal political funding from the business community became difficult. In this way, the conditions to control the ruling party and parliament that made a king out of the president completely evaporated. In other words, even after democratization, Presidents Kim Yong-sum and Kim Dae-jung, like their predecessors, controlled three powers and played the role of king, supported by the Confucianist-authoritarian culture. However, in the three years from the last days of the Kim Dae-jung government to the inauguration of President Roh Moo -hyun, the new generation with a new political culture joined political parties. Civil and labor movements led by such new-generation politicians have developed to deny the conventional Confucianist-authoritarian political culture. Then, transformation of the new political culture to secure the separation of three powers as the Constitution stipulates. As a result, President Roh Moo -hyun is now unable to control parliamentarians of the ruling party. In addition, he can not go beyond the mandate as head of the administrative power under the principle of separation of three powers. It was manifested when he was forced to suspend his duties as president due to the impeachment motion, and that the judgment whether or not the impeachment motion was constitutional was left to the Constitutional Court. It showed that the judicial department that had no clout in the past can now control the administrative department. South Korea can now safely be considered as being able to govern itself as stipulated in the Constitution like advanced democratic nations. That is to say, the president is no longer a dictator, but will discharge duties as keeper of policies. That is Prof. Hahm's analysis of the new phase of South Korea politics after the presidential impeachment motion was adopted at parliament. Next, the following is remarks made by Prof. Park of Pusan University. The new political culture led by the "386 generation" is now dismantling the old political parties. At the same time, the political parties are modernizing themselves. In line with that, realignment of the political parties is proceeding. Meanwhile, under economic development policies of President Park Chung-hee, pro-administration regions were favorably treated, which

caused regional conflicts. The Kim Dae-jung government deftly took advantage of such rifts. However, with emergence of the new generation, such regional conflicts started to be resolved. With the new political culture taking root in society, South Korean democracy will enter a new phase. Judging from the interviews with Professors Hahm and Park and results of my own field research, in South Korea, not only horizontal control of the separation of three powers, which is the foundation of the liberal democratic system of the United States, but also vertical control over the state power from the bottom by various voluntary local/civil societal groups is now being institutionally established. It seems that the democratic system is taking root even deeper.

In the April 2004 parliamentary election, the Open Uri Party, a pro-Roh Moo -hyun party which was just formed, won a majority in parliament. The Constitutional Court rejected the impeachment motion against President Roh Moo -hyun by the previous assembly without making a constitutional judgment. By this, President Roh resumed duties. At the same time, his own party has become the ruling party with a majority in parliament. Thus, conditions to implement policies to help the new political culture take root in society have been met. However, the presidential authorities have been limited to the boundary stipulated in the Constitution. Therefore, final decisions on policies will be made mainly at parliament. Even if the president has the initiative in making policies, it will be difficult for him to exercise leadership for rapid transformation as in the past. The new political culture with affinity to democracy that President Roh and new-generation politicians are promoting is likely to consolidate in South Korean society, though it will take long time and many twists and turns. When the new political culture has taken firm root in society, South Korean democracy will match those of advanced nations in name and in substance. We shall see what is going to happen.

Meanwhile, development of the new phase of democratization in South Korea shows that among the constituting principles of a modern nation, the universal principles of democracy and liberalism are hard to take hold, unless a political culture that has affinity or is palatable with them has taken root in a broad base of the people. Regarding democratization of the countries that Dr. Rice named as “the outposts of tyranny”, without a strategy to turn the native political culture embodying nationalism hostile to liberal democracy into one palatable to liberal democracy, its success is doomed.

(January 20, 2005)