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KOREA: CHALLENGES FOR DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

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INTRODUCTION

In December 2002, South Koreans elected their fourth president since the country's transition to procedural democracy in 1987. The significance of these elections is that to all outside appearances, they demonstrate that South Korea has made a successful transition to a fully democratic system of government. Today, unlike in the years immediately following the 1987 elections and even as recently as the 1997 Asian financial crisis, there is general consensus that a return to the pre-1987 days of military involvement in the political process or usurpation of power by an incumbent president has become virtually impossible. The military has become sufficiently professional to dismiss any speculation about a possible military coup. The election process appears to be firmly entrenched in South Korean society with a growing expectation that campaigns will be run fairly, or at least with increasingly less visible corruption. Political parties, while still vulnerable to personality dominance and a lack of ideological distinction, are generally recognized as the legitimate means for articulating political demands within the society.

Even more to the point of a maturing democracy within South Korea, there has been a growing demand by civic groups and individual citizens for fair and responsive leaders. Civic activism for identifying and isolating corrupt and incompetent politicians within the system has grown over the years. Recent presidents Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-sam have seen their sons prosecuted for political corruption. Prominent businessmen have been prosecuted for financial misconduct, several politicians have been removed from power for political corruption and the generals have been removed from the political process. In the words of Adam Przeworski, South Korea is approaching the minimum structural conditions for democratic consolidation where democracy 'becomes the only game in town…[and] all the losers want

to do is to try again within the same institutions under which they have just lost'.[1]

This apparent success in establishing democracy in a country without a democratic tradition, along with the juxtaposition of the last Stalinist holdout in North Korea, has made South Korea one of the more interesting cases of democratic transition among the countries that have undergone the transition to democracy as part of the third wave of global democratization.[2] With June 29, 1987(the date that Roh Tae-woo promised to institute direct presidential elections, among other initiatives) isolated as the defining moment in the transition, South Korean democratization has been the subject of investigation by a variety of scholars with a wide range of perspectives. Indeed, with its spectacular economic growth under the authoritarian regimes of Park Chung-hee and Chun Doo-hwan in the 1970s and 1980s followed by the increase in civil protest supported by the new middle class, South Korea served as a textbook example of the economic preconditions theory of democratic transition. South Korea also represented a classic case for those interested in the cultural aspects of democratic transitions.[3] Given the political intrigue associated with the presidential elections in 1987, some have also presented Korea as a classic case of elite contingency calculations driving the transition process.[4] Regardless of the theoretical orientation of the analysis, the common conclusion is that by all accounts South Korea has made a successful transition to democracy. In fact, there is general consensus in the comparative politics literature that the transition to direct presidential elections with suffrage extended to a relatively high percentage of the adult population and a reasonable opportunity to vote for the opposition is firmly in place—the fundamental characteristics of the political order Dahl refers to as polyarchy.[5]

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[1] Adam Przeworski, Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p.26.

[2] For a discussion on the waves of democratic transition see Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

[3] See for example Geir Helgesen, *Democracy and Authority in Korea: The Cultural Dimension in Korean Politics* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1998) and Daniel Bell et. al., *Towards Illiberal Democracy in Pacific Asia* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995).

[4] Manwoo Lee, *The Odyssey of Korean Democracy* (New York: Preager, 1990) and Hyug Baeg, 'The Politics of Democratic Transition From Authoritarian Rule in South Korea', Sang-Yong Choi, ed., *Democracy in Korea: Its Ideals and Realities* (Seoul: the Korean Political Science Association, 1997), pp.71-92.

[5] Dahl specifically refers to polyarchy as being distinguished by two broad characteristics: Citizenship extended to a relatively high proportion of adults and the rights of citizenship

Beyond the transition itself, scholars have examined how South Korean political institutions and political values have been modified and adapted through the consolidation phase of the democratization process. Here we find much less optimism regarding the institutionalization of democracy in the country. Although again argued from various perspectives, there appears to be a general consensus among analysts that South Korea has yet to achieve a fully consolidated democracy however the analyst chooses to define the term. For example, Diamond and Kim introduce their edited volume analyzing the institutionalization of democracy in South Korea by stating that, 'its political institutions remain shallow and immature, unable to structure meaningful policy courses and to provide the responsiveness, accountability, and transparency expected by the South Korean public'.[6] Throughout the volume, individual contributors point consistently to a pattern of interplay between political institutions, political culture and political behavior that has contributed to the general 'weakness' of democracy in the country. Elsewhere, in a more structural analysis of the democratization process, Croissant argues that since the transition in 1987 the usurpation of power by the executive branch, the corresponding weakening of the legislative branch and the ongoing ineffectiveness of the judiciary have precluded democratic consolidation for now or in the near future.[7] Others have attempted to show the general incompatibility between Korean civic or political culture and the democratic institutions established with the founding of the republic in 1948.[8] The conclusion drawn is that the consolidation of democracy is fundamentally

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including the opportunity to oppose and vote out the highest officials of the government. More specifically, he specifies seven institutions that distinguish a polyarchy. They are: elected officials, free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage, right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative information and associational autonomy. Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp.220-221.

[6] Larry Diamond and Byung-kook Kim, 'Introduction: Consolidating Democracy in Korea,' in Larry Diamond and Byung-kook Kim eds., *Consolidating Democracy in Korea* (Boulder: Lynne Reinner Publishers, 1991), p.2.

[7] Aurel Croissant, 'Strong Presidents, Weak Democracy? Presidents, Parliaments and Political Parties in South Korea', *Korea Observer,* Vol. 33, No. 1 (Spring 2002), pp.1-45.

[8] Sunhyuk Kim in 'Civic Mobilization for Democratic Reform,' in, Larry Diamond and Doh Chull Shin eds., *Institutional Reform and Democratic Consolidation in Korea* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1999), pp.279-303 argues that while citizen mobilization was instrumental in achieving the transition, the inability to channel their energies into political parties has been a detriment in the consolidation process. In a more expansive argument, Helgesen *op. cit.*, argues that the general incompatibility of Korean culture with western democratic structures precludes full consolidation of liberal democracy in Korea. Also see Doh Chull Shin, *Mass Politics and Culture in Democratizing Korea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

different, and indeed more difficult, than the transition to democratic institutions as a means of government.

The critics take up several themes seen as the primary challenges to further consolidation of democracy in South Korea. First, there are the predominant arguments that some sort of institutional reorganization is needed either (or both) on the input side to allow for better articulation of political demands within Korean society or on the output side to provide better delivery of political decisions by the government. Second, there is the notion that both the political elite and the Korean people must somehow become more committed to democracy as a superior form of government. In other words, the argument here is that there is some sort of flaw in Korea's political culture that has to be modified. Third, the emergence of a stronger civil society complete with voluntary organizations that helps sustain popular involvement in the political process is viewed as necessary to provide momentum for institutional reform and fostering trust in the political process.[9]

The emergent pattern is that while there is general satisfaction with the transition to democracy, the consolidation of democracy is somehow more difficult and perhaps there is something inherently defective about the consolidation of democracy in South Korea. The task is to evaluate that proposition in the context of how the concept of democracy was introduced in Korea and the role the concept has played in the transition process. This chapter begins with a brief review of the structural evolution of democracy on the peninsula. With that basic framework in place, I highlight some of the most common criticisms of the consolidation process and examine their root causes. The chapter concludes with some thoughts regarding the way forward for the development of a truly Korean style of democracy.

The essential distinction between the terms 'democratic transition' and 'democratic consolidation' is that the transition phase is the initial movement away from an authoritarian system during which there is a replacement of the non-democratic institutions and procedures. Necessary aspects of this transition are the implementation of new rules governing the political process and an initial willingness on the part of political actors to follow these newly established rules. The transition ends with the first democratic elections and the assumption of power by the democratically elected government.[10] The

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[9] Diamond and Kim, *op. cit.*, pp.1-20.

[10] Aurel Croissant, *op. cit.,* pp.6-7, attributes the notion of conceptually separating of the transformation phase from the consolidation phase to Guillermo O'Donnel and Philippe Schmitter, 'Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain

consolidation phase is more complex and generally involves the process of making the new democratic institutions and procedures a routine part of the political process within the country. During this phase, the adaptation of the new rules and procedures leads to a persistence of process and a stable democratic system. Not surprisingly, the more open-ended nature of this phase has also led to a much wider diversity in the way it is characterized in the literature.[11]

In his paper on the consolidation of democratic institutions in Korea, Croissant presents a model to argue that the consolidation process occurs in three dimensions.[12] First, the constitutional dimension involves the ability of constitutional organs and political institutions (e.g., electoral system, head of state, parliament) to function both as independent institutions as well as in conjunction with the other components. This dimension involves vertical consolidation within each institution as well as horizontal consolidation between the various institutions. Second, the representational dimension refers to the ability of political parties to serve as 'gatekeepers' of the political system. Essentially, the consolidation in this dimension reflects the ability of the party system to transform societal demands into effective policy options that serve as a channel for realizing political aspirations for the majority of citizens. The third dimension is attitudinal and associational consolidation, which refers to the attitudes towards the political system and the perceived legitimacy of the democratic process within the country. With full consolidation, a democratic ethos would permeate the society with an expectation that democratic principles would be applied to all aspects of political, economic, social and cultural life.

Democracies,' in O'Donnell, Schmitter and Lawrence Whitehead eds., *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

[11] Hyug Baeg Im, 'South Korean Democratic Consolidation in Comparative Perspective,' in Diamond and Kim eds., *op cit,* pp.21-23 presents the range of views on the issue of consolidation. He suggests that minimalist conceptions that limit consolidation to institutionalization of competition through elections are too narrow. However, it should be noted that there is a general lack of consensus regarding the concept of political consolidation in the comparative politics literature. In her article, Andreas Schedler suggests there are at least five conceptions of the process (avoiding breakdown, avoiding erosion, completing, organizing and deepening) used in the political science literature. The first two conceptions focus on preventing breakdown of democracy while the other three focus on the process of institutionalizing democracy's basic ground rules for some implicit or explicit idealized model of democratic government.

[12] See Aurel Croissant, *op. cit.* Within the presentation, Croissant attributes much of his conception of the three dimensions to Wolfgang Merkel and Leonardo Merlindo.

The attractiveness of this model as a starting point lies in the fact that it encompasses the general themes mentioned above that run through much of the current literature on the consolidation process in South Korea, namely the strengthening of democratic institutions and the role of political or civic culture. One of the possible shortcomings of the model is that it tends to be based on a normative model of democracy in that it assumes there is a desired model of democracy that can be observed through the behavior of political actors in the context of the democratic institutions established in the transition phase of democratization. The potential problem is that eventually one must go beyond the institutions of democracy and examine the basis for Korean attitudes about them, namely Korean culture and its particularistic history.

DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN SOUTH KOREA

There is a body of historical evidence that suggests there was what John Kie-Chang Oh refers to as a 'proto-democratic' movement in Korea associated with the *Minjung* (peoples') movement of the later Yi Dynasty, which culminated in the *Tonghak* (Eastern learning) rebellion of the late1800s. In referring to the teachings of the *Tonghak* movement, Oh states that they 'held the first identifiable embryos of what may be called 'populist' concepts.[13] Elsewhere, the *Tonghak* rebellion is also identified as the inspirational source for Korean resistance movements over the years.[14] The significance of this connection is that these resistance movements are now becoming the inspirational source for much of the enthusiasm for Korean nationalism among the younger generation of Koreans. Perhaps because these resistance movements have never been particularly successful in gaining any meaningful political power, analysts examining the development of democracy in Korea have generally ignored them.

A large part of the reason that South Korea has attracted the attention of scholars interested in democratic transition is the dramatic way in which the political institutions of the Republic of Korea were established. Prior to the first constitution in 1948, South Korean society had no real experience with democratic institutions. Following thirty-five years of Japanese occupation, which ended along with World War II, most Koreans had no understanding of

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[13] John Kie-Chang Oh, 'Kim Dae-jung and a Populist (Tonghak) Origin of Korean Democracy,' in *The Korea Society Quarterly* (Spring 2001), p.54.

[14] See Soon-kwon Hong, 'Korean Minjung's Resistance and the Growth of Modern Consciousness from 1876 to 1910 in Korea,' *International Journal of Korean History,* Vol. 2, (December 2001), pp.137-157. Also see Kenneth Wells ed., *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

democratic institutions or representative politics. The election of members to the first National Assembly and drafting of the first constitution were based on a decision by the US Military Government in Korea to establish a separate Korean state south of the thirty-eighth parallel; this after three years of military occupation in the face of a communist regime in the Russian-occupied zone north of the thirty-eighth parallel that refused to agree to UN supervised elections. Not surprisingly, the structure of the First Republic was strongly influenced by the American presidential system. The first president, Syngman Rhee, who was educated and spent nearly forty years in exile in the United States, was nominally elected by the National Assembly, but clearly chosen by the United States to be the first leader of the country.[15] The unicameral National Assembly was made up of two hundred legislators, of which eighty-five were officially listed as independent. The remaining 115 members represented fourteen different political parties.

This rather abrupt establishment of a democratic government without significant participation by the South Koreans themselves also created a serious void on the representational side of the process. With no national-level parties and more than 340 officially registered parties formed by individual politicians as vehicles for personal or, at best, local interests, there was no effective means for aggregating political demands in the legislative system.[16] To complicate matters even further, with the imminent threat of communist subversion from both within and from the north, there was little opportunity for the development of an ideologically coherent opposition to the president, while there was an urgent need for decisive action to deal with the triple crises of economic development, rebellion and eventually war. Given the circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that Rhee became increasingly powerful by the end of the Korean War in 1953. After the war, Rhee was elected by popular vote by increasingly large margins in 1956 and 1960. However, in the face of abysmal economic conditions, growing protests in South Korea and weakening support from the United States, Rhee eventually went into exile in Hawaii.[17]

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[15] Bruce Cummings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), p.195.

[16] Aurel Croissant, 'Electoral Politics in South Korea,' in Aurel Croissant ed., *Electoral Politics in Southeast and East Asia* (Bonn: Freidrich-Eibert-Stifung, 2002), pp.234-235 refers to these more than 340 parties as proto-parties.

[17] Based on electoral statistics provided by the National Election Commission, Aurel Croissant, 'Electoral Politics in South Korea', *op. cit.*, p.264, shows that Rhee garnered 70 percent of the vote in 1956 and 100 percent of the vote in 1960. Also see John Kie-Chiang

The disillusionment with the Rhee presidency led, in 1960, to a new constitution which provided for a parliamentary form of government with a bicameral National Assembly. With the explicit goal of developing a democratic system that would prevent the abuses of power experienced during the Rhee administration, the new constitution greatly reduced the role of the president while expanding individual freedoms of assembly and association. Although the Democratic Party, which had been the main opposition party during the later days of the Rhee presidency, won a vast majority of seats in both houses of the parliament, a split in the party within months of the elections led to legislative gridlock. With continuing economic problems, accusations of corruption within the government, and widespread student demonstrations demanding punishment for the Rhee government, the Second Republic was replaced by a military junta led by Major General Park Chung-hee in 1961, ushering in an extended period of strong military influence in South Korean politics.

After a nearly two-year period of transition under the control of a military junta led by Park, the Third Republic was established in 1963. A new constitution with a strong presidential system and a weakened National Assembly was adopted through national referendum. During the transition, Park ensured his own role in the future civilian government by eliminating potential rivals from the ranks of the military, banning more than four thousand politicians from previous regimes and eventually retiring from the military.[18] The presidential elections held in 1963 were conducted in a relatively fair manner with Park winning by a slim margin with 46.6 percent of the vote. Park was elected to a second term in 1967 with 51.4 percent of the vote. In both 1963 and 1967 the Democratic Republican Party, also held a slight majority in the National Assembly.[19]

The Park government's immediate focus was on economic development and control of the population to ensure full implementation of the centrally formulated economic development plans. Throughout the 1960s the

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Oh, *Korean Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp.40-43 for a summary of the street protests and the withdrawal of support from the United States following the 1960 elections.

[18] Han Sung Joo, 'South Korea: Politics of Transition,' in Sang-Yong Choi ed., *Democracy in Korea: Its Ideals and Realities,* (Seoul: The Korean Political Science Association, 1997), pp.30-31.
[19] Election results show that in 1963 Park Chung Hee won 46.6 percent of the vote in a field of five candidates with Yun Po-sun, who had been President during the Second Republic, coming in second with 45.1 percent. In 1967 Park won by a wider margin over a field of six with Yun Po-sun again coming in second with 40.9 percent of the vote. Aurel Croissant, 'Electoral Politics in South Korea', *op.* cit., pp.235, 265-268.

Economic Planning Board, managed by professional economists, and the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), managed by former military colleagues, served as personal instruments for the implementation of Park's vision for a strong anti-communist South Korea. The strength of this centralized bureaucracy served to further marginalize an already constitutionally weak National Assembly. Under the KCIA's control of internal affairs, opposition politicians were under constant threat of being declared a communist or North Korean sympathizer under the National Security Law. Political parties served as personal extensions of their leaders, which reinforced the perception that the best avenue for articulating political demands was through personal networks. As had been the case under the increasingly centralized system of Rhee in the 1950s, one of the primary venues for expressing political demands throughout the 1960s remained large-scale street demonstrations, typically led by student organizations.

By the end of the 1960s, with Park taking full credit for a rapidly growing economy, a national referendum was held to approve an amendment to the constitution to allow for a third presidential term. In 1971 Park won the presidential election over Kim Dae-jung, who was portrayed by the Park campaign as being 'pro-Communist'. However, the relatively close margin of victory (53.2 to 45.3 percent) was at least partial motivation for Park to insulate himself, in the name of national security, from ever facing elections again. In October 1972, Park declared martial law, dissolved the National Assembly, banned political parties and closed all national universities and colleges in the name of 'developing democratic institutions best suited for Korea'.[20] Following the declaration of martial law, the constitution was again amended and ratified through a national referendum. Significant changes included a provision to prolong Park's presidency indefinitely through indirect elections by a tightly controlled National Conference for Unification, the right of the president to nominate one third of the National Assembly member for election by the NCFU, and to dissolve the Assembly whenever he deemed necessary.[21] The new constitution, which was referred to as *Yushin* (revitalization), ushered in the Fourth Republic and a new era of repression in which Park became increasingly isolated and paranoid about criticism of the government. By 1979, when Park was assassinated by his KCIA director, the country was once again being torn apart by violent street demonstrations led by students, but increasingly supported by a rapidly growing middle class.

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[20] Oh, *op. cit.*, , p.60.
[21] *Ibid.,* p.59.

Clearly Park, in his nearly 20 years as leader, had a tremendous impact on the development of South Korea's political system. By the end of his tenure, the system was uniquely designed to support the continuation of the Park regime. When he died, there was no viable mechanism to replace him. Therefore, it is not surprising that despite an attempt by the interim government to revise the constitution and eliminate the more draconian measures of the *Yushin* system, another military junta, this time led by Chun Doo-hwan, took control of the central government in the name of ensuring national security.[22] Once again, martial law was declared, the National Assembly was dissolved and political parties were banned for nearly a year while a new constitution was developed to serve as the basis for the Fifth Republic. With the new constitution completed, a newly formed electoral committee elected Chun as president for a seven-year term and National Assembly elections were held in 1981.

In many respects, Chun's tenure was a shortened replay of the Park era in that the government maintained tight control over both economic development through the conglomerate patronage system and became increasingly brutal in its attempts to control an increasingly large segment of the population that was resorting to street demonstrations. In the absence of a meaningful system for aggregating political demands, the newly expanded middle class grew more and more willing to support increasingly violent demonstrations by students and labor unions. One important difference was that from the beginning Chun promised to work towards a peaceful transfer of power at the end of his tenure. Despite attempts by Chun to create a party system that would ensure the ruling party would retain power after the transition, by 1985 the opposition party, led by Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-sam and emboldened by growing pressure from the increasingly violent street protesters, had grown strong enough to engage in a serious push to revise the constitution prior to the 1987 elections.

Certainly Chun and his handpicked successor and military academy classmate Roh Tae-woo recognized the need for change. Accordingly, Roh, with the explicit support of Chun, drafted a democratization package, which was presented by Roh on June 29, 1987 as the 'Declaration of Democratization and Reforms' in a somewhat obvious attempt to avoid defeat

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[22] The transitional government led by Ch'oe Kyu Ha revoked several of the 'emergency decrees' of the Park regime, restored civil rights of Park's main political rivals and other academic, labor and religious leaders who had been accused of communist sympathizers by Park. Oh, *op. cit.,* pp.74-75.

in the upcoming elections. [23] In October 1987 the National Assembly drafted, and a national referendum subsequently approved, a new constitution that contained much of the contents of the declaration, including the direct election of presidents to single five-year terms, a strengthened role for the National Assembly that included the right to impeach the president and inspect state affairs, political neutrality for the armed forces and a reaffirmation of civil rights and due process.

Despite the transparent manipulation, Roh surprised many by winning the election in 1987, although the reason was probably tied as much to the unwillingness of both Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-Sam to join forces to defeat him. Roh won the election with 35.9 percent of the vote, while Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung received 27.5 and 26.5 respectively.[24] Nevertheless, the election served as a watershed in Korean politics. Roh, a former Major General, served as a good compromise between the previous attempt at democracy in 1960, when the system was gripped in gridlock, and the authoritarian regimes of Park and Chun. With a strengthened National Assembly in which the three opposition parties and the independents held a majority of the seats, Roh adapted remarkably well to party politics. After two years of being pushed around by a somewhat raucous National Assembly and accused of incompetence in dealing with pressing economic issues, he, along with Kim Young-sam (the former political activist) and Kim Jong-pil (Park's erstwhile assistant), formed a three-party alliance that gave them a sizeable majority in the National Assembly. Although it was another transparent case of political manipulation, the significance of this turn of events should not be understated. It was the first time that the president chose to engage the opposition within the confines of the constitution rather than attempt to solidify control through vertical integration of the executive branch using coercive means. In other words, the Roh administration's actions reaffirmed a commitment by the political elite to the idea of party politics as a means for maintaining political support.

The elections in 1992 brought the next important test for democracy in Korea. After a realignment of power among the parties during the National Assembly elections that reduced the strength of the 'super-party' created by

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[23] The eight specific items included in the declaration include a call for direct presidential elections, a revision of the presidential election law, amnesty and restoration or civil rights for dissidents, strengthening of all basic rights in the new constitution, promoting freedom of the press, increased local autonomy, improved climate for the growth of political parties and social reforms to built a clean and honest society, Oh, *op. cit.,* pp.93-101.

[24] Aurel Croissant, 'Electoral Politics in South Korea', *op. cit.*, p.266.

the coalition in 1990, the presidential elections fielded three primary candidates with no military background or significant military support. In fact, the armed forces took a deliberately neutral stance despite the fact that one of the candidates (Kim Dae-jung) was viewed by many as being too radical. The winner, Kim Young-sam, in many respects represented the compromise solution much as Roh had in 1987. Although he had aligned himself with the mainstream in the 1990 coalition, he still represented a moderate voice of protest from the past. During his administration, Kim actively worked to further institutionalize democracy by taking a series of measures explicitly designed to discourage military involvement in politics, to reduce corruption within the executive branch, and strengthen the legislative system through local autonomy and election reforms.

Perhaps the most memorable undertaking of the Kim Young-sam administration was the public trial of former presidents Chun and Roh for political corruption for amassing illegal wealth through bribes as well as mutiny and treason for their roles in the 1979 coup and the ensuing 1980 Kwangju massacre. The unmistakable message was that Kim Young-sam intended to show that the judicial system was capable of handling the toughest of cases. It certainly did not wipe away all the abuses of the military-dominated rule, however it did serve to advance the primacy of the rule of law under a civilian government and enhance the constitutional authority of the Supreme Court. Together with other reforms, there was a sense that constitutional consolidation had been completed by the end of the Kim Young-sam administration.

With the 1997 election of the opposition party candidate Kim Dae-jung serving as convincing evidence that democracy had passed its first 'turnover test,' the South Korean democratization process demonstrated a remarkable ability to incorporate what had been radicalized elements into the mainstream of the South Korean political process.[25] Clearly, the institutional structure was now well within Dahl's definition of polyarchy and its focus shifting to representative consolidation.[26]

Beyond the election, Kim Dae-jung did for relations with North Korea what Kim Young-sam had done for domestic politics. As a person who had been characterized and imprisoned as a communist sympathizer, Kim Dae-

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[25] Kim Dae-jung's role in the democratization is legendary, having been the target of both the Park and Chun regime's vengeance. Almost miraculously he survived everything from political exile to imprisonment, to a death sentence to at least two assassination attempts. John Kie-Chiang Oh, *Korean Politics,* p.60, 232.

[26] Note 3 above.

jung was under considerable scrutiny early in his tenure by conservative elements in South Korean society. Through his characteristic persistence and careful implementation of the policy of engagement with North Korea, commonly referred to as the 'Sunshine Policy', one of his major contributions was the opening up of the ideological debate regarding South-North dialogue. Prior to his administration, South Korean debate on the subject was basically limited to ways in which the North would be eliminated from the international scene. By the end of the administration it was possible for Roh Moo-hyun to win the next presidential elections by taking an ideological position that openly advocated a continuation of a peaceful dialogue with the North versus Lee Hoi-chang's position that North Korea should be contained.

The financial crisis of 1997 served as an important milestone in the democratization of the domestic agenda in South Korea. As I have suggested, both military coups and much of the justification for the authoritarian regimes of the past were predicated on the failure of civilian governments to deal effectively with economic issues. The fact that the country could deal with the crisis without resorting to the centralizing tendencies of the past reinforces the notion that South Korea had come to place increasing trust in the civilian leadership for resolving issues. For the first time since Park embarked on the economic development quest, there was a willingness to engage in a national dialogue about pro-development versus pro-democracy. Beyond the crisis, there has been a further reduction in the role of the large conglomerates in politics and an increased willingness by the military to remain under civilian control.

In many ways the election of Roh Moo-hyun in 2002 represents the culmination of the textbook case of democratic consolidation. As a civil rights lawyer who advocated the removal of US forces in the 1980s Roh represents the antithesis of the restrictive ideological perspective and tight central control present at the start of the consolidation in 1987. The process of systematically incorporating increasingly radical elements of the population into the political system with each subsequent administration has been truly remarkable. Certainly much of the success of the consolidation should be attributed to men like Kim Dae-jung whose faith in the system kept him coming back for thirty years despite so many disappointments and challenges. It is also a testament to the growing acceptance of the democratic process following the rather vague ideal put forward by the original constitution.

ASSESSING PROGRESS TOWARD DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

However, as the extensive research on the subject testifies, there are some significant structural problems remaining for Korea's process towards democratic consolidation, especially in the areas of representational consolidation and the horizontal integration between the various branches of government.[27] These structural deficiencies continue to make South Korean politics vulnerable to manipulation by individuals with personal or restricted agendas and may lead to the institutional gridlock that in the past led to a reversion to centralized control.

In terms of representational consolidation there continues to be a lack of ideological distinction between the parties. For example, during the 2002 presidential elections there was still a great deal of shifting within the party structure. The near collapse of Roh's Millennium Democratic Party following mass defections by National Assembly members, the truncated campaign by Chung Mong-joon under a newly created party and the alignment of Park Kyun-hye with Lee Hoi-chang just weeks before the election all suggest that there is still a lack of ideological distinction between the parties. This continual shifting of loyalty between parties and the emergence of parties based on the personal perspective of individual politicians reflects a certain structural weakness of parties to broaden their ideological bases to deal with national-level interests.

The lack of horizontal consolidation within the government continues to plague relations between the president and the National Assembly. As Croissant correctly asserts, the relationship between these two 'generally oscillates between the two extremes of hyper-presidential dominance on the one hand and institutional gridlock on the other'.[28] The danger of this oscillation was clearly demonstrated during the Kim Young-sam administration, which began its tenure with a long series of executive decrees under a strong popular mandate to implement a wide range of reforms only to

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[27] Two edited volumes, Larry Diamond and Byung-Kook Kim eds., *Consolidating Democracy in South Korea* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000), and Larry Diamond and Doh Chull Shin eds., *Institutional Reform and Democratic Consolidation in Korea* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), have been published to specifically address the consolidation of democracy in Korea. Within, these volumes, individual authors address a wide variety of topics dealing with the difficulties associated with institutional reforms needed to complete the consolidation of democracy initially envisioned in the Roh Tae Woo's 1987 declaration to the National Assembly.

[28] Croissant, 'Strong Presidents, Weak Democracy?', *op. cit.*, p.14.

end up in failure, as it was unable to build a strong supporting coalition in the National Assembly to complete the reforms. As a result, the administration achieved initial success in the areas of anti-corruption among the elite, but was unable to complete wider economic and social reforms later in the administration as it was unable to coordinate its efforts with the opposition parties in control of the National Assembly.[29] Similar dilemmas have faced the Roh Tae-woo and Kim Dae-jung administrations when they were faced with a majority opposition in the National Assembly and in each case, the tendency has been for the president to resort to his decree authority—reminiscent of the solution sought by the strongman regimes of Rhee, Park and Chun. Proposed solutions have ranged from minor modifications to the election process such as linking the National Assembly and presidential elections or switching to a parliamentary form of government.[30] The point is that unless these structural weaknesses are addressed in a systematic way they will continue to make the political process in South Korea vulnerable to a wide range of problems including corruption, cronyism, and regionalism, all of which eventually lead to the potential for institutional paralysis.

Another area that has received critical attention throughout the consolidation phase of Korean democratization is that of individual rights and freedom of expression. Much of the criticism leveled against the central government is associated with the persistence of the notorious National Security Law. Promulgated in 1948 to protect the 'State' from 'enemies' defined in one Article as 'any person who defames constitutional organs,' the law has been used over the years to prosecute political opponents.[31] It was paradoxical that the law was still in place after five years of the administration of Kim Dae-jung, who had been sentenced to death under its provisions. However, there remains a general reluctance to significantly modify the law, partly in deference to the large portion of the population that continues to believe the law prevents North Korean subversion, especially among the student population.

As have previous administrations, the Kim Dae-jung administration also came under criticism by the annual Press Freedom Survey conducted by Freedom House for its continued political and economic pressure especially

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[29] Young Jo Lee, 'The Rise and Fall of Kim Young-Sam's Embedded Reformism,' in Diamond and Shin, *op. cit.*, pp.97-126.

[30] Larry Diamond and Doh Chull Shin, ' Introduction: Institutional Reform and Democratic Consolidation in Korea,' in Diamond and Shin, *op. cit.*, p.39. Also see Hoon Juang, 'Electoral Politics and Political Parties,' in *Ibid.,* pp.43-71.

[31] Oh, *op. cit.,* p.37.

on the print media.[32] Elsewhere, Human Rights Watch has actively protested the continued detention of human rights advocate Suh Joon-sik, while the International Press Institute placed South Korea on its watch list in 2001 for harassment of independent media.

One area of representational consolidation that has seen a dramatic improvement, as the political process has expanded to incorporate larger segments of the population, is that of civic organizations. There is an assumption that legitimate civic organizations replace radicalized protest movements as the mechanism for aggregating political demands as the country matures as a democracy, Croissant argues that these organizations, which grew in number from 1,322 in 1984 to 2,181 in 1996, with 75 percent being founded between 1987 and 1996, have, in fact, replaced the older student groups, labor union activists and farmer dissident groups.[33] However, it is also the case that following the 1997 financial crisis, the government was actively engaged in suppressing labor-union organizations involved in protesting measures to eliminate restrictions on firing workers. Similarly, several student organizations such as the *Hanchongryon* continue to be the subject of government sanctions in the name of the National Security Law.

South Korean attitudes towards the progress made in terms of institutional reforms have been somewhat skeptical. In an extensive analysis of the political attitudes, Doh Chull Shin refers to a large segment of the population as 'critical democrats,' meaning those who broadly accept democracy as a preferred alternative to the authoritarian regimes of the past, while remaining skeptical of the daily performance of the government and suspicious of political institutions.[34] One conventional indication of this scepticism is the declining participation in elections. For example, participation in the presidential elections has declined each year since 1987 when 89.2 percent of the registered voters participated to the 2002 race when 70.2 percent participated.[35]

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[32] Annual Press Freedom Survey. Freedom House, 2002. The report was specifically critical of the Kim Dae-jung administration's decision to bring a massive tax evasion suit against the five largest daily newspapers in what appeared to be retaliation for printing negative stories about its North Korean engagement policy and showed a downtrend in the degree of press freedom in South Korea. http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/pressurvey.htm.

[33] Croissant, 'Strong Presidents, Weak Democracy?', *op. cit.*, p.34

[34] Doh C. Shin, *Mass Politics and Culture in Democratizing Korea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p 124.

[35] Aurel Croissant, 'Electoral Politics in South Korea', *op. cit.*, p 266 and 'North Asia,: Assessing the Implications of Roh's Victory, in *Asiaint.com,* January 2003. .

What becomes apparent in trying to isolate aspects of attitudinal consolidation is that while institutions are important in terms of providing a framework within which democratic transition occurs, they are marginally useful in understanding actual attitudes towards democracy itself. They are both cause and consequence. In other words, it is true that a strong civil society does help build a strong basis for aggregating political demands. However, it is equally true those civic organizations are likely to prosper in a context where people know that they are the primary mechanism for aggregating political demands. Similarly, while it is true that strongly institutionalized political parties help consolidate attitudes towards democracy, it is equally true that the consolidation of democracy helps strengthen and institutionalize political parties. This fact, then, is an interesting observation, but not terribly informative in terms of explaining democratic consolidation.

This leads to a confrontation with a more problematic aspect of attitudinal consolidation in South Korea, that of cultural acceptance of democracy as a universal value rather than an ideology. Here we enter the generation-long debate about political culture introduced primarily by Almond and Verba in the 1960s.[36] The problem arises in that there is the assumption within the approach that anything other than acceptance of Western or 'modern' attitudes towards democracy are 'traditional' and somehow inadequate to the challenges of a truly participatory democracy. Accordingly much of the literature on the cultural aspects of the democratic transition in South Korea either starts with the premise that Korean, or Asian or Confucian values are somehow detrimental to or constitute insurmountable barriers to democratic consolidation. The argument is succinctly summarized by Francis Fukuyama when he states:

If we take Confucianism as the dominant value system in Asia, we see that it describes an ethical world in which people are born not with rights but with duties to a series of hierarchically arranged authorities, beginning with the family and extending all the way up to the state and emperor. In this world there is no concept of the individual and individual rights; duties are not derived from rights as they are in Western liberal thought, and although there is a concept of reciprocal obligation between ruler and ruled, there is no absolute grounding of government responsibility either in popular will or in the need to respect an individual's sphere of autonomy.[37]

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[36] Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba are generally credited with introducing a systematic analysis of political culture in their book titled *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

[37] Francis Fukuyama, 'Asian Values, Korean Values, and Democratic Consolidation,' in Diamond and Shin, *op. cit.*, p.307-308.

For South Korea, these 'barriers' to democracy usually include some reference to Confucian reliance on authoritarianism, filial piety (veneration of elders), and patriarchy as being obstacles to a fully consolidated democracy based on Almond and Verba's conceptualization of political culture as those 'political orientations necessary to achieve a truly democratic civic culture'.[38] The assertion then is that these attributes of traditional Korea serve as barriers to the full development of democracy in Korean society. Another aspect of Korean culture cited as inhibiting democratic consolidation is Korean familism, which is frequently attributed to Korean shamanism and blamed for a patronage system that encourages politicians to reward votes with favors and, more generally, political corruption. Here the charges are that this 'traditional' feature of Korean culture prevents effective party consolidation at the national level, promotes bias in regional economic development and sustains crony capitalism.

This mindset that there are some universal Confucian principles that drive Asian societies away from democracy is found on both sides of the 'Asian values' debate. On the one hand are scholars such as Fukuyama and Huntington who view the notion of a Confucian democracy as a sort of contradiction in terms.[39] Essentially, the argument is that the Confucian emphasis on authority over liberty and social responsibility over individual rights precludes the adoption of democracy in cultures influenced by Confucian thought. On the other hand are scholars such as Bell and Jurasuriya who argue that although there is the potential for compatibility between the two, it is more a matter of justifying democracy in terms of its value in promoting equality and familial ways of life rather than individual freedoms and rights.[40] In both cases, however, there is an assumption that Confucianism is a somewhat monolithic force that ignores other contending values that influence evolving political systems in the region.

In a somewhat different vein, the 'natural' regional cleavage between the Honam and Youngnam regions of the country is blamed for limiting the effectiveness of national-level parties and creating an impediment to democratic consolidation. The difference from the universalizing tendency of the Confucian compatibility debate being that although not directly attributed to Korean culture, there is a tendency to transfer the historical differences

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[38] Almond and Verba, *op. cit.*, p.13.

[39] Huntington, *op. cit.*, p.37.

[40] Daniel A. Bell and Kanishka Jayasuriya, 'Understanding Illiberal Democracy: A Framework,' in Daniel A. Bell, David Brown, Kanishka Jayasuriya and David Martin Jones eds., *Towards Illiberal Democracy in Pacific Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp.1-16.

between the two regions onto the modern political system as if direct presidential elections re-ignited some primordial hostility between the regions.[41] Again, this sort of analysis falls short in that it focuses the attention on historical antecedents as the root cause rather than on how the modern elites such as Japanese colonialists and the Park and Chun regimes used those antecedents to maintain control of the political processes in the country. The difference is not insignificant.

The persistence of these universalizing analytical approaches is reflected by Diamond and Shin when they conclude that South Korean 'support for democracy...tends to remain superficial, fragmented and mixed with authoritarian habits'.[42] In fact, what remains superficial is the South Korean embrace of the democratic institutions that do not seem to fit very well in South Korean society. As a result, there are essentially two languages present in South Korean politics. On the one hand there are the formal acknowledgements of liberal democracy and capitalism that are enshrined in the constitution and the institutions adopted in 1948 as an ideological vaccine against communism. On the other hand, there are the informal relationships that serve as a pragmatic and functional underpinning of Korean acceptance of liberal democratic principles in terms of Korean culture. For example, although political parties have been present since 1948, the fact is that they continue to serve as platforms for individual candidates from the Presidential candidates to the lowest local assembly official to consolidate support in a highly personalized network that is readily recognizable as an adaptation of Korean familism to the institutional framework of liberal democracy.[43]

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[41] It should be noted that Wonmo Dong in 'Regional Cleavage in South Korean Politics,' *Korea Observer,* Vol. 26, No. 2 (Summer 1995), pp.1-26, correctly identifies the discriminatory policies of the Park Chung Hee regime in the 1960s and 1970s as exacerbating the regional cleavage between the two regions. However, he goes on to suggest that the problem originated in the center-periphery antagonism that developed during the Chosun (Yi) Dynasty (1392-1910), or perhaps even earlier during the Silla Kingdom (668-935), which was centered on the nobility from the Youngnam region. Also see Gregory Henderson, *The Politics of Vortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968) for a discussion regarding the impact of the centralized bureaucracy of the Chosun Dynasty on the development of modern political relationships in South Korea.

[42] Diamond and Shin, 'Institutional Reform and Democratic Consolidation', *op. cit.,* p.35.

[43] Byung-Kook Kim, 'Party Politics in South Korea's Democracy: The Crisis of Success,' in Diamond and Kim, *op. cit.,* pp.63-66, attributes the origins of familism in Korea to Confucianism. Helgesen, *op. cit.,* suggests that Shamanism, which he suggests has a longer history in Korea than Confucianism and persists in Korea despite official prohibition, has an equally important role in reinforcing the importance of familism and patriarchy in Korean society.

Elsewhere, others argue that the two Confucian concepts of *minben* (power and authority are derived from and based on the masses) and *winmin* (elites pursue public interest and serve the masses) form the moral basis for Korean understanding of electoral democracy and political legitimacy.[44] This basis, coupled with a pragmatic imperative for social order and economic prosperity, made the acceptance of democracy quite tolerable despite the obvious contradiction that the military strongmen of the pre-1987 era represented to the Western world. Without any deeper basis in Korean culture, Kim Byong-Kook argues that these adaptations represent a serious danger to the persistence of democracy in that they have delayed the recognition of any viable political cleavages on which to base party politics. Instead, political parties have been formed around regional cleavages, which he correctly notes are superficial and cannot serve as a long-term basis for meaningful political cleavages because they are derived from the extended familism practiced by the politicians of the pre-1987 democratic era and not actual ideological differences between people from the regions.[45]

We are left to conclude that with the disappearance of the ideological basis (that is, a means for resisting communism) and the achievement of its procedural goal of conducting free and fair presidential elections, democracy has lost its way in South Korea. For Kim, the failure is attributed to the inability of Korean culture to adapt to the structural imperatives of liberal democracy.[46] In effect, he is arguing that South Korea represents democratic endurance rather than any consolidation of democratic institutions in support of universal liberal democratic principles. The challenge then becomes finding some political cleavage to help foster a sense of democratic competition among political parties.

The 2002 presidential election was interesting in this respect in the ideological cleavage that emerged over how to deal with North Korea, characterized in the words of the Roh Moo-hyun campaign slogan 'peace or war'. However, this would appear to be a rather temporary cleavage in that it seems extremely unlikely that with the generational shift occurring in the country that there could ever be a shift back to a hostile policy towards the

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[44] Byung-Kook Kim, *op. cit.*, pp.71-72. Also see Viren Murthy, 'The Democratic Potential of Confucian *Minben* Thought,' *Asian Philosophy,* Vol. 10, No. 1, 2000, for a more complete explanation of the concepts in the context of Confucian philosophy.
[45] Byung-Kook Kim, *op. cit.*, pp.79-80 describes Korean regionalism as 'an amorphous sentiment of belonging without a specific program of policy action'. He further argues that the voters themselves rejected the notion of regionalism as a legitimate organizing principle.
[46] *Ibid.*

North without some sort of catastrophic event similar to a replay of the war. Rather, the fact that it appeared late in the campaign and only after more traditional approaches such as coalitions of political convenience and grand promises to virtually all constituencies appeared to be failing, suggests that the highlighting of the difference was indeed temporary.

Perhaps a more interesting part of the Roh Moo-hyun campaign has to do with the fact that in the later days of the campaign he spoke the unspeakable when he suggested that South Korea would not automatically support the United States if it chose to take military action against North Korea. The fact that this could be said at all is testament to the notion that the old ideological basis for democratization has deteriorated to the point that people no longer see the threat of communism from the North as a basis for making political choices. Further, this sentiment reflects the rapidly rising sense of Korean nationalism, a nationalism that traces its origins to the *Tonghak* (Eastern Thought) movements of the late 1800s and more recently the *Minjung* (people's) movement of the 1980s. In this context, it is important to recognize that the ideological foundation of the revitalized *Minjung* movement in the 1980s is based on two essential tenets. First, the ideology asserts that the fundamental problem in Korea is the separation of the country following the end of World War II, which has led to a dependence on the United States. In that sense the US has been viewed as a successor to the Japanese colonialists and the *Yangban* (ruling elite) of the Chosun Dynasty. A second assertion from the ideology is that, based on that dependency, all the US-backed regimes served to repress the people (*minjung*) the nation (*minjok*) and democracy (*minju*).[47] Given these ideological roots, it should not be surprising that, once elected, the rather pragmatic Roh Moo-hyun has quickly distanced himself from the more radical elements of the current anti-American protests. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that there is a strong undercurrent of mistrust and resentment against not only a continued American military presence in the country, but also the generally dominant role the US has played in South Korean politics since the inception of the Republic in 1948.

What is important about the emergence of nationalism is that it appears at a time when there is a search for a new ideological basis for democracy within Korea. Given the fact that South Koreans have come to embrace democracy as 'the only game in town,' the challenge for its further consolidation is to recognize the need to root future changes in the institutional structure of democracy in the cultural foundations of Korean nationalism. As if the

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[47] Oh, *op. cit.,* p.88.

challenge of attempting to consolidate political institutions was not difficult enough, the Koreans face a second challenge of reconciling those institutions with a populist movement that has grown over the decades as a challenge to the ideological basis of the institutions themselves. Certainly, the suppression of the populist movements by previous regimes makes the task more difficult, though the passing of the Kim presidencies will ease the burden if only because there is no longer pressure to accommodate the factions of the original democracy movement.

PROXIMATE TASKS OF DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

Given the context of the incomplete institutional consolidation and the shifting ideological basis for democracy, there are four proximate tasks associated with democratic consolidation in Korea. These tasks will not complete the consolidation task. However, they will provide a useful framework for further consolidation in terms of the current disjunction between popular attitudes towards political action and the political institutions of democracy.

The first proximate consolidation task (a challenge for each president since the inception of the Republic) is the need to reduce the level of corruption in both the daily operation of the government as well as in the election process. Or, perhaps more accurately, the challenge is to better institutionalize the corruption in more acceptable ways than has been done in the past. This task takes on increased importance today because with the new generation that is coming into power there is the opportunity to demonstrate in a visible way that the practices institutionalized during the 'strongman' era and continued by the first generation of democracy advocates are no longer necessary to achieve political success. First, in terms of the election process, the fact that Rho Moo-hyun was selected as the Millennium Democratic Party nominee through a primary election process suggests that there is an opportunity to institutionalize the selection process while minimizing the influence of 'backroom' negotiations. From an institutional perspective, the campaigns of both Roh and Lee relied much more on the support of civic organizations than past elections, which should at least help institutionalize campaign financing even if it does not eliminate all of the corruption. Second, it will be equally important for the Roh administration to continue and strengthen anti-corruption measures initiated by both Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung with the specific purpose of avoiding a perception of bias in political appointments and involvement of his family in political deal-making. This becomes critical in Korea as further movement toward democratic

consolidation will increasingly require the political elite to identify themselves with the democratic 'rules of the game,' which includes an agreement to treat everyone equally before the law—something that appears to have been lost on families of the previous generation of democratic leaders in Korea.

A second task to be undertaken sooner rather than later is to reduce the importance of regionalism on national-level politics. Although it is generally recognized that much of the problem with regionalism stemmed from the Park regime's deliberate favoritism towards the Youngnam region, the fact remains that regionalism continues to be an issue in South Korean politics as evidenced during the 2002 elections, when Roh Moo-hyun won well over 90 percent of the vote in the Honam provinces of North and South Cholla and Lee Hoi-chang won 77.7 percent in Taegu City and 73.4 percent in North Kyongsang province in the Youngnam region.[48] Despite the anticipation that the problem of regionalism will disappear with the passing of the Kim era, the election results suggest that there will have to be explicit policies implemented to further reduce the importance of regional politics in future presidential elections. Given that Roh Moo-hyun is from the Youngnam region and will be under less pressure to compensate for previous abuses than was Kim Dae-jung, it should be comparatively easy to avoid the pattern of appointing his staff and Cabinet based on regional considerations as Kim Dae-jung has been accused of doing. However, the huge disparity in the voting patterns between the two regions in the 2002 elections suggests that it will require more than symbolism on the part of the Roh Moo-hyun administration to demonstrate a movement away from regional favoritism in both economic development initiatives and political appointments.

To make effective progress in these tasks a third task that must be undertaken is for the political elite to acknowledge and accept the non-Korean origins and aspects of the Republic. Specifically, this will mean an acknowledgement that the Syngman Rhee government was to a large extent 'installed' by the US and that the Republic itself was established in response to the threat of communism in the North rather than as an expression of Korean nationalism or cultural demand for democracy. That fact does not de-legitimize the current government as much as it allows for a more factual accounting of the decisions made during the period of the democratic transition prior to 1987. As I have shown, the political system during that period was almost exclusively controlled by the elite, and political demands of

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[48] So, Su-min, 'Regionalism Manifested Again in Election—West for Roh, East for Lee', *Korea Times*, December 21, 2002, http://www.korealink.co.kr/times/times.htm.

the larger population were left to the same mechanisms that had served as the outlet for popular demands since at least the 1860s when the *Tonghak* movement began.

Another aspect in recognizing the non-Korean origins will be the acknowledgement of the Japanese origin of much of Park Chung-hee's effort to develop the economy.[49] The effects of this acknowledgement are already well underway in that the large Korean conglomerates have been gradually dismantled following the 1997 financial crisis. What has been missing is the explicit recognition that much of the economic and political infrastructure that helped sustain those conglomerates was based on a Japanese model despite the consistent government policy of making it illegal to import Japanese culture. Further manifestations of the shift have been the gradual shift away from American influence and the easing of restrictions on Japanese culture during Kim Dae-jung's presidency. This aspect is difficult for the South Korean government in that it partly affirms the criticism leveled by the North that the successive governments in the South were 'puppets' of the United States and Japan. Nevertheless, as the ideological basis for the government shifts more explicitly to nationalism, the acknowledgement of Japanese influence becomes both easier and more necessary. It becomes easier because it signals a willingness to incorporate an element of South Korean society into the mainstream of the political system. It becomes more necessary because an unwillingness to acknowledge the nationalist heritage would eventually alienate the political elite from the popular sentiment.

Along similar lines, the fourth proximate task is to acknowledge the authoritarian past, both in terms of the tendency in historical Confucianism toward centralized control in the name of the social control and the emphasis on the 'output' institutions that have characterized previous South Korean governments.[50] Here it is important to distinguish between an acknowledgement and fatalistic acceptance. In other words, the fact of the authoritarian past should not be used as an excuse for the continuation of a 'so-called' illiberal democracy or a reversion back to the control mechanisms for the purpose of intimidating those who disagree with government policies that have characterized the Kim Young-sam and, to a lesser extent, the Kim

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[49] Cummings, *op. cit.,* pp.358-359 and Oh, *op. cit.,* pp.48-50.
[50] Han Sung Joo, 'South Korea: Politics of Transition,' in *Democracy in Korea: Its Ideals and Realities* (Seoul: The Korean Political Science Association, 1997), p.67 refers to the 'over-development of output institutions' especially the military and civil control institutions such as the KCIA and the Economic Planning Board during the Park regime as the natural extension of Confucian tendency to centralized control as exacerbated by the Japanese colonialists.

Dae-jung administrations. One of the most urgent mandates that must be undertaken is the elimination or at least serious revision of the National Security Law. As written, the law is violated every day there is contact between the South and the North and no longer serves any real purpose other than to potentially intimidate private citizens who make contact without explicit South Korean governmental approval.

In terms of Confucian tendency to centralization, the argument is not about tradition versus modernity or, in other terms, to replace Confucian 'social harmony' values with Western 'civic culture' values. Instead, the need is to recognize that in Korea, the tendency has been to treat popular protests as an aberration rather than as a voice of legitimate public concern with aspects of the political system. As long as the political elite resists incorporating these demands into the political process, there will be the need to take dramatic action after the protests have become such an obvious scar on social harmony that they can no longer be ignored. Therefore, the recognition should that this sort of denial is actually rather detrimental to social harmony and that incorporating these voices into the mainstream political process would actually be a fulfillment of Confucian values.

DEVELOPING KOREAN-STYLE DEMOCRACY

A major theme that emerges from the examination of the democratization process in South Korea is that the consolidation of democracy is a fundamentally different problem from that of the initial transition. Essentially, what we have seen is that prior to 1987 during the transition phase democracy was a goal focused on the normative belief that democracy and its supporting market mechanisms were superior to the communism adopted in the North. Despite this, the fact is that the leadership during this period exhibited behavior that suggested they were less than fully committed to Dahl's polyarchic principles of individual freedoms and free and fair elections.[51] However, during the consolidation phase, the 'practice' of democratic politics should extend to ever-larger circles of citizens beginning with the political elite of the opposition and hopefully expanding to the most radicalized elements of society. In Korea, we have seen that clearly the opposition elite represented by Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung were included in, and demonstrated extraordinary faith in, the democratic process even before 1987. During the consolidation phase there has been a growing sense of democratic expansion as evidenced by the expansion of civic organizations involved in aggregating

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[51] Note 3 above.

political demands in a systematic fashion rather than in the form of street protests.

However, we have also seen that especially in the 'opposition phase' of the consolidation process, there is a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the political institutions and government adoption of democratic practices.[52] Some of the dissatisfaction stems from the shift in the ideological basis for democracy from the Cold War debate over democracy versus communism to one grounded in Korean nationalism. Evidence that the shift has not yet been completed manifests itself in several areas. Much of the nationalist movement remains outside the mainstream of Korean politics, largely based on the expectation that student groups espousing nationalism represent subversive elements supported by the North. Similarly, the protest movement against American troop presence on the peninsula, which has come to represent adherence to the former ideological basis, remains largely a street movement, although the fact that both candidates in the 2002 election ended up calling for a re-examination of the rules governing the presence of US military on the peninsula suggests that there is a general recognition by the political elite that it will be necessary to include the issue in future political discourse. Within Korean policy circles the emphasis on the need for a dismantlement of the Cold War structure on the peninsula also suggests that the shift to an ideological basis for democracy grounded in Korean nationalism is rapidly becoming a behavioral norm that will allow the inclusion of at least a major portion of the indigenous populist movement dating back to the Tonghak rebellion into the mainstream of Korean politics.

The assessment of the institutional aspects of democracy and the proximate tasks associated with the representational consolidation suggest a more fundamental dilemma facing any assessment of Korean attitudes towards democracy, namely a reconciliation of Korean culture and democratic norms. The immediate problem faced in this context is the matter of measuring norms based on observed behavior. Using this approach, we can examine the record of Kim Young-sam and Kim Dae-jung and conclude that, as outlined earlier, because their administrations acted in non-democratic fashion in dealing with political adversaries or in financing their respective election campaigns, they

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[52] Here I am referring to the Kim Dae-jung administration as the opposition phase of the consolidation process based on the definition of polyarchy provided by Dahl in that the Kim administration represented the first successful election of the opposition party. Despite his identity as the opposition prior to 1987, the election of Kim Young-sam in 1992 should not be viewed as the first election of the opposition based on his alliance with Roh Tae Woo and the majority party in 1990.

were not fully committed to democratic norms. Some scholars take it a step further and suggest that it represents the incompatibility between traditional Korean culture and democratic norms.[53]   There are two important considerations to remember here. First, individual actors within the system are acting on any number of norms beyond those ascribed to some ideal form of democracy. Therefore, it would be wrong to conclude an administration is 'non-democratic' based solely on observed behavior. Until norms of democracy that are different from the observed behavior they are supposed to explain are articulated, it will be difficult to attribute causality of behavior. Second, the notion that traditional Korean culture competes with democracy suggests that both democracy and culture are static systems that simply compete in a world of cultural norms.

Democratic consolidation in Korea or any place else is not about modernity versus tradition. Instead it is about the gradual adaptation of a variety of norms in the context in which they are acted upon. The longer democracy remains the dominant political ideology, the more it becomes accepted as a dominant norm and the more it becomes a dominant norm the more it becomes the dominant ideology. So, democracy has changed Korea and Korea has changed democracy. Along the way a host of influences have impacted on Korean attitudes towards democracy well beyond a static notion of Confucianism. In fact there are a number of influences that have had a major influence on so-called traditional norms of behavior since the adoption of democracy in 1948. For example, South Korea has become a largely urban society with a very internationalized citizenry. There has been a shift in religious orientation so that today nearly fifty percent of those claiming religious affiliation describe themselves as Christians. The country has experienced a civil war and a generation of military strongman leadership along with an extended presence of US forces. Similarly, there have been the moderating influences on the 'American style' democratic institutions including Confucianism, Buddhism, vestiges of Japanese colonialism and Korean nationalism.

The real underlying challenge in the consolidation process then is the adaptation of Korean identities into the democratic process. That is why reconciliation between Korean nationalism and the institutional arrangements that were put in place during the transition phase of democratization is so

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[53] This follows the argument made by Kwang Yeong Shin and Chulhee Chung in a conference paper titled, 'Cultural Tradition and Democracy in South Korea,' (ND) available at http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/korean/ksaa/conference/papers//04chulheechingkwangyeongshin.pdf, downloaded 30 November 2002.

critically important. This relationship represents the nexus between the two separate democratic identities that have evolved in Korea. They are the merger between the populist identity from the later days of the Chosun Dynasty and the liberal democratic identity that was formed among the political elite since 1948. The reconciliation will enable creative Korean solutions to the unique Korean issues related to the adoption of democracy grounded in Korean identity.

How this reconciliation plays itself out should be observable in the four proximate tasks discussed above. As there is a growing acknowledgement of the non-Korean origin of the institutional organization of the present government, one would expect to see a greater willingness to examine alternatives to the existing constitutional arrangement and representational mechanisms. Certainly, there must be some recognition that dealing with the issue of regionalism and political corruption will involve re-examining these issues as problems that are unique to Korea since the practical arrangements that have allowed these practices evolved outside the controls of modern democracy and were blamed on traditional culture. However, the practices also evolved outside the constraints of any traditional moral norms and were blamed by others on the introduction of democratic institutions. The challenge then is to find a set of 'game rules' that provide for the aggregation of political demands that is recognized by participants as being fair and consistent with norms associated with fair representation and family or regional identities. Clearly these solutions cannot be based on any normative universal from an idealized form of liberal democracy. Rather they must be grounded in the emerging Korean identity that takes into account its entire past in the search for a truly representational democracy.

In conclusion, Korea is at the threshold of democratic consolidation. It is clear that Korea has moved well beyond the threat of returning to the military strongman politics of the 1960s and 1970s. The demand for civilian government elected through free and fair elections is firmly entrenched and there is general acceptance of the notion of opposition parties and ideologies. However, there remains a disjuncture between populist and political elites that occurred at least partially as a result of the circumstances surrounding the development of democracy in Korea. With the ideological basis of democracy moving in the direction of nationalism, there is an excellent opportunity to reconcile this disjuncture. In addition, the consolidation of Korean attitudes towards democracy requires the reconciliation of existing political institutions with Korean identity. Reconciliation must be a mutually reinforcing process, whereby the institutions are modified to adjust to Korean identities just as the

existence of these institutions over the past 50 years have modified Korean identity with traditional political values. What is clear is that there is no particular aspect of Korean identity that precludes the development of liberal democracy. Although the particular form Korean democracy ultimately takes almost certainly will be different from that found in the United States or, for that matter, Western Europe. Nevertheless, if the Korean people are allowed to find an appropriate balance between the need for the community values that are valorized in traditional identity structures and the individual freedoms that are valorized in liberal democracy in the context of its own historical circumstances, it will be a happy place.