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## From Entourage to Ideology? Tensions in South Korean Political Parties in Transition

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# FROM ENTOURAGE TO IDEOLOGY? TENSIONS IN SOUTH KOREAN POLITICAL PARTIES IN TRANSITION

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## I. Introduction

The plethora of political party formation and reformation has been an important characteristic of the Republic of Korea's political process since liberation in 1945. They sprout, as the saying goes, as bamboo shoots after the rain. They may sprout, but few grow, most shortly wither, and only the exceptions flourish for a season or two, but then are transmogrified into a new incarnations and names. Some have been destroyed by the authorities, but most simply are used to fulfill the aspirations of their leaders to achieve *daekwon*, or great power.

Those careers may be as personally ephemeral as the party is institutionally transient. They are generally formulated and disappear in preparation for general elections.<sup>1</sup> As Henderson has written, 'Korean political parties are formed as grudging and precarious expedients by individuals who would rather reach power by themselves. Party purpose is not rule, it is access to rule.'<sup>2</sup> Helgesen wrote, '...a political party in South Korea is a volatile phenomenon, more dependent on its leader than on any ideology or formal organizational structure. The leader does not represent the party; rather it is the other way around; the party constitutes the leader's support network. In other words, the leader is the party.' (Emphasis in original).<sup>3</sup> To be elected to public office—to lead rather than to follow—has had an almost magical attraction: individual advancement and prestige unrelated to any programmatic intent. It is better, as the Korean saying has it, to be the head of a snake than the tail of a dragon.<sup>4</sup>

This phenomenon was apparent just after liberation in 1945. By January 1948, the U.S. military authorities listed 48 political parties, of which the U.S. characterized 18 as 'rightist,' 6

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1 Byong-Man Ahn, *Elites and Political Power in South Korea* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2003). Before the 1948 elections 48 parties were formed, and before the 1950 elections 38. P. 208. The analogy to bamboos is also from Ahn. Even this may be an underestimate. Some authors attribute the growth of political parties partly to the simplistic reaction of the U.S. military occupation, which by October 24, 1945 almost immediately after the occupation started, listed some 54 registered political parties, which by March 1946 had increased to 134 because the U.S. said it would only deal with such groups. C.I. Eugene Kim and Young Whan Kihl, *Party Politics and Elections in Korea* (Silver Spring, MD: Research Institute on Korean Affairs, 1976), p. 9. In the 1960s, a young eminent Korean author suggested writing a play about Korea exporting political parties, since they were excellent at forming them and there were so many, and Korea could not export anything else at that time. Personal interview, Seoul.

2 Gregory Henderson, *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969) P. 274. This early observation still has validity almost two generations later.

3 Geir Helgesen, *Democracy in South Korea*, NIAS Reports No. 18 (revised Edition), Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), 1995, p. 28.

4 We are indebted to Dr. Kim Choong Nam for that proverb.

were 'left,'<sup>14</sup> were 'communist,' and 10 were 'neutral.'<sup>5</sup> The Republic of Korea has experienced the formation of some two hundred political parties since liberation. There were 160 parties by the end of the *Yushin* period (1979). The transitory and entourage nature of Korean political parties is an apparent, and to date a continuing, characteristic of the political culture. This essay examines why and speculates on new challenges to the more traditional, evolving pattern.

Plural political parties are guaranteed under the liberal 1987 constitution, and in spite of the provision that 'political parties shall be democratic in the objectives, organization, and activities,'<sup>6</sup> parties have generally been programatically meaningless. The fusion of political parties in 1990, an attempt to change the political structure from a presidential system with a single term for the chief executive to a parliamentary system with the potential for continuous power, illustrates most graphically an underlying manipulative ethos of the South Korean political culture. It was an example of political form and power over intellectual or programmatic substance, of Machiavellian maneuvering over ideology, of entourage politics over party structure. Its purpose was to move a process of a continuing 'lame duck' presidency, with the potential for the dominant figure losing that authoritative position in the society because of single-term limitations, into a perpetual power play of a single party split only by internal coalitions and entourages.

Ironically, in highly nationalistic South Korea the politicians adopted a Japanese model. The ruling Democratic Justice Party (conservative) of President Roh Tae Woo agreed to fuse with two minority opposition parties, the Reunification Democratic Party (moderate reformist) of Kim Young Sam and the New Democratic Republican Party (right wing) of Kim Jong Pil to move the nation from an exceedingly strong but temporally limited presidential system to a parliamentary one and to create the Democratic Liberal Party (DLP). It was designed to rule indefinitely based on the explicit model (even to the juxtaposition of the names) of the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had at that time an almost complete monopoly on power since Japanese independence following the American military occupation after World War II. Kim Young Sam, a dissident who had been placed under house arrest by authoritarian President Chun Doo Hwan, was chosen, and reportedly agreed, to be nominated as the new executive chairman and then, with a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, so amend the constitution to institute the new system.<sup>7</sup>

Controversy remains as to why he reneged on his supposed commitment to initiate the parliamentary system and thus deny the possible fruits of political change to the opposition, which at that time was headed by his dissident archrival, Kim Dae Jung, with whom he had been at loggerheads for about two decades. This did ensure, however, that entourage politics would continue to dominate in South Korea until after the new millennium. 'Once again, the merger proved that Korean political parties were peculiarly personal cliques that formed, disappeared, or

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<sup>5</sup> 'A Brief Summary of Pertinent Information on Political Parties in South Korea.' Seoul: U.S. military authorities, January 23, 1948. It also lists 354 organizations, including political parties. Curiously, the National League of Confucius and the Christian Democratic Alliance were both considered as communist.

<sup>6</sup> Helgesen, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed discussion of the machinations of the various leaders at that time, see Manwoo Lee, "South Korea's Politics of Succession and the December 1992 Presidential Election," in James Cotton, ed., *Politics and Policy in the New Korean State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

merged at the direction of key individuals, the “bosses.”<sup>8</sup>

Following Kim Young Sam’s election to the presidency in 1992, in which he defeated Kim Dae Jung and the upstart political rival (and head of Hyundai) Chung Ju Young in December 1992, he initiated a number of reforms and seemed intent on increasing Korea’s prestige abroad.<sup>9</sup> South Korea succeeded in December 1995 in joining the OECD, the club of industrial nations of which Japan was previously the only Asian member. President Kim Young Sam’s motivation in pushing for such membership seems to have lacked an economic rationale, and was likely more prompted by international and internal prestige considerations. He may not have realized, however, that there were serious repercussions to such membership in both the social and political fields.

In March 1996, the Director General Designate of the OECD came to Seoul and met with President Kim. A few days after that meeting, President Kim organized a commission that was to report in six months to look into the political and organizational effects of the new labor requirements, because under OECD rules Korea was in violation of the freedom of labor. Korean labor had been assiduously controlled by the state. Under Park Chung Hee, there was only one legal umbrella labor union, the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), whose leadership, if not directly subordinated to the Korean CIA (KCIA), seemed strongly influenced and indirectly controlled by it.<sup>10</sup> Whatever sectoral or plant labor unions had been allowed to exist were often those organized by management. The government did not recognize the legality of the more left-centered Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), which effectively threatened the monopoly of the FKTU in spite of its illegality. Labor had been free to strike after political liberalization in June 1987, and did so with alacrity because their wages had been artificially suppressed to enable Korea to find its important export role in international trade.<sup>11</sup> But the unions had been prohibited from engaging in political activity and supporting or proffering candidates for election.

President Kim’s commission reported back in six months but was split in its recommendations. Then, at a December 1996 6:00 a.m. surreptitious meeting of the National

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8 John Kie-Chiang Oh, *Korean Politics: The Quest for Democratization and Economic Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 117-118.

9 The two most important measures were the forced destruction of the Hanahoe, the underground military cabal that ensured the perpetuation of military influence throughout the society, and the ‘real name’ bank account system, which forced accounting of hidden funds that avoided taxation and could be used for political purposes. The military’s removal from political power without demonstrations or ferment was a singularly successful effort that should be further studied to see its potential application in other states, and the real name accounts enabled the prosecution and conviction of former presidents Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo on charges of corruption.

10 It is interesting to note that the FKTU was founded in 1946 ‘with the blessings of the American military authorities.’ Chulsu Kim, ‘Parties and Factions in Korean Politics.’ Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1973, p. 200. ‘The FKTU had no grassroots base and no genuine interest in promoting worker welfare. Rather, its sole objective was to compete with, and eventually destroy, the leftist labor unions.’ Hagen Koo, *Korean Workers: The Culture and Politics of Class Formation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 26.

11 There were only 276 labor disputes in 1986, but after liberalization 3,749 in 1987. Koo, *op. cit.*, p. 159. The freeing of labor and the spurt in labor costs, together with U.S. pressures to revalue the won, led to the movement of labor-intensive industries to low-cost (and largely controlled) labor states in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia. Since Korean recognition of the Chinese and Vietnamese governments, the Asian financial crisis of 1997, and the end of the Multi-Fiber Agreement, this pattern shifted, with a great deal of investment moved to China, which is now South Korea’s largest trading partner and investment target.

Assembly about which the opposition members had not been informed and thus were absent, the government party passed a series of acts, including ones on the labor movement, that caused consternation in that sector, resulting in demonstrations of some three million workers that forced the revision of these laws in late January.<sup>12</sup> Thereafter, labor could be directly and legally involved in the political process. This set the stage for the legal political growth of a labor movement that slowly was to become an important influence on the political process in Korea. The FKTU lost its unique position. All labor unions, however, have been losing membership, with important implications for the future of labor in the political process.<sup>13</sup>

This change, and with it the generally left or liberal ideological orientation within a political structure, however, did not spring whole cloth from the OECD membership and the subsequent ability of labor to act politically. It had a long gestation period following liberation from Japan in 1945, and was impeded by a political culture deeply imbued with traditional Confucian values of hierarchy, authority, and power (supplemented and unintentionally reinforced in part by a military template superimposed on the traditional values), and to these we must now turn.

Previous efforts to induce ideological elements into the political process that were viewed as left-wing, and thus subversive, were suppressed by various right-wing and anti-communist regimes that feared North Korean infiltration and influence, as well as their own loss of power. Labor was generally viewed as leftist, not only because of historical communist efforts to organize labor internationally, but more specifically because the only party allowed in North Korea was the Korean Workers Party. The National Security Law and its precursors effectively prevented the development of sustained and legal left-wing ideological and labor movements. Because the current economic crises facing North Korea may give the impression that the North was always weak, the relative status of the living standards and economic strength of North and South Korea should be noted; North Korea had higher standards of living than the South well into the 1970s, and was considered a greater threat than in the period after the mid-1990s.

## II. Korea's Political Culture and the Quest for Orthodoxy

The standard academic litany has been that Korea was even more Confucian than its traditional ideological mentor, China. Whatever the truth of that assertion, it is evident that certain ideological Confucian remnants strongly influenced the political culture of Korea, both North and South (although the following comments only apply to the Republic of Korea). If only one or two percent of South Koreans view themselves as religiously Confucian, virtually the population as a whole is socially Confucian. As a Korean academician turned politician remarked, 'Korea operates on Western hardware and Confucian software.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Koo, *op.cit.*, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Union membership, as a percentage of employed workers, reached a high of 24.3 percent in 1977. It was 23.3 percent in 1989, but dropped to 13.8 percent by 1998. Koo, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>14</sup> Personal interview, Seoul. There are many studies on the influence of Confucianism on Korean politics, but for a succinct statement, see Oh. *op. cit.*, pp. 8-18. Helgesen (*op. cit.*) and his *Democracy and Authority in Korea. The Cultural Dimension in Korean Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), make the case for the influence of culture on politics in Korea.

Korean political culture has positively evolved in many respects. It has developed all the standard procedures of a democratic state. A universal electorate now elects officials at national and local levels in free and fair elections (and in spite of numerous violations of exceedingly stringent election laws).<sup>15</sup> The National Assembly (legislature) is often vociferous in its critical but sometimes even physical debate, and can interrogate administration officials. The judiciary has in the past two decades even found against the government for the first times in Korean history. Highly politicized, expanding, and nationalistic civil society organizations provide watchdog services on politics and on any government in all sectors, including human rights, labor, consumer affairs, the environment, and on elections themselves. The press and media in general are freer than they ever have been, although not without pressures from the state even under the most liberal of administrations. As we have noted, political parties multiply and divide. Yet this writer has called Korea a modified democracy—a ‘procedural’ one in which democratic procedures are melded with traditional concepts of power and authority.<sup>16</sup> What has prompted that assessment?

Elements of the traditional Weberian patrimonial society remain in Korea and negatively affect the democratic process. Korean political parties as entourages are a direct result of the fundamental concept that power in Korea, as in many traditional societies, is considered finite, not infinite, and thus any effort to share power is anathema, as sharing is losing.<sup>17</sup> Sharing becomes a zero-sum game. Under such circumstances, power becomes highly personal, and a necessary corollary of such concepts is that institutions, such as political parties that have an authoritative figure at its apex are more entourages than permanent or semipermanent organizations. Leadership is intent on attaining *daekwon* (great power or authority), which is the prerogative of the head of state. Recruits to the dominant party, either before an election or after, join or switch parties and are motivated by the desire to participate in that power, prestige, and for future rewards, which thus increases the authority of the leader. At the same time, such personalization virtually and inevitably leads to factionalism based on these personal loyalties, and such factionalism, as many have written, has been a hallmark of the Korean political scene both in modern and monarchical times.<sup>18</sup>

As Pak wrote:

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<sup>15</sup> The most egregious problem facing elections is corruption related to campaign financing, and the provision of funding by businesses through the banking system to party politics. The complaint by the IMF and the World Bank of the close and inappropriate connections among businesses, government, and banks that brought on the Asian financial crisis of 1997 is simply one aspect of a pervasive problem that affects both the internal and external performance of the society. That President Kim Dae Jung provided some hundreds of millions of dollars through the banking system and Hyundai *chaebol* to North Korea before the June 2000 summit indicated that these forces were still highly significant. For a discussion of political financing, see Ahn, op. cit., pp. 307-15.

<sup>16</sup> See David I. Steinberg, ‘Korea: Continuing Democratic Reform in the Republic of Korea: The Unfinished Symphony,’ in Larry Diamond, ed., *Deepening Democracy in Korea* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> The idea is from Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, ‘The Concept of Power in Javanese Culture,’ in Claire Holt, ed., *Culture and Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972). It can be applied to many traditional societies with modifications, and is related to Foster’s concept of the limited good in peasant economies.

<sup>18</sup> For additional material on factionalism, see Ki-shik Hahn, ‘Political Party Organization and Elections,’ in Edward Wright, ed., *Korean Politics in Transition* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975). That comments and analyses on the Korean political scene of a generation earlier are still valid testifies to the remarkable persistence of such factors.

The most serious consequences of factionalism were the development of '(a) intolerance and suspicion among party members; (b) inflexibility and solidification of attitudes detrimental to the politics of compromise; (c) opportunism, rather than principles, on vital issues; and (d) general chaos of the parties detrimental to rational deliberation and formulation of party policies.' These developments had impeded the emergence of a workable party system.<sup>19</sup>

Kim Chul-su noted:

The elimination of leftist and progressive parties has in turn produced party politics to struggle for power and confined the political dialogue to the procedural matters rather than substantive ones. Institutionalization of party structure and leadership has (sic) been delayed by personality in internal political parties. At the rank-and-file levels, the commitment to a political party is rarely made on the basis of ideology or policy, but for reasons of money, personal power, special interest, blood relations and the like.<sup>20</sup>

The president, in the past usually the leader of the party or someone under his sway, has extraordinary power, his role is often referred to in Korea as the 'imperial presidency.' He is far stronger in his country than the American president is in his. He is also more powerful than the Korean kings of the Yi (Chosun) Dynasty, who had to balance power among the *yangban* (gentry), who controlled the court. His power is compounded because, until recently, he and his close associates, rather than any local constituency, controlled nomination of aspirants to legislative office.<sup>21</sup> Further, because of a proportional representation system under which extra seats were allocated to parties dependent on the percentage of the vote they obtained, the incumbents of those seats were beholden not to any constituent group, but solely to the chief of the party. There have been charges that often those candidates high on the list of potential proportional seats contributed funds to the party coffers for such positions. As one politician wrote:

'In Korea, what kind of result will the presidential system produce? They believe all the power resides in the president. Here is a tremendous conceptual problem. Constitutionally, the president is the head of the nation and representative of the state, and is head of the army and can declare an economic emergency, but he is only in charge of the executive branch and cannot work alone without others. In spite of this, our country's presidents without exception believe they have all the power and all the responsibility, and they can do anything they want...The president is elected by the

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<sup>19</sup> Pak, *op. cit.* p. 174. The quotation is from Kwan Bong Kim, *The Korea-Japan Treaty Crisis and the Instability of the Korean Political System*, p. 256.

<sup>20</sup> Chulsu Kim, 'Parties and Factions in Korean Politics.' Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1973. He also noted that the weak party organizations produced factionalism. Although this may be true, it is a rather simplistic explanation of more complex factors, noted herein.

<sup>21</sup> Helgesen (*op. cit.*, p. 22) notes that when Kim Dae Jung was in opposition, he personally chose all his party's candidates, and when asked why, he replied why not?

people, but once elected the president holds absolute power. This is the greatest cause of the problems of politics today.’<sup>22</sup>

Korean political parties are the weakest link in the Korean democratic processes. There have been multitudes. Parties are generally transitory, changing their names according to their leaders’ predilections and the prevailing political geomancy or *poongsoo* (Chinese fengshui, lit. wind & water = landscape). They have had few serious programmatic priorities as platforms, have not trained new leadership from within the party, and generally acted as entourages to pursue the political fortunes of its leaders. The purpose of a party is to get or retain power for its leadership, not generally in the past to push forward a policy program.<sup>23</sup> Elected or candidate members of the National Assembly often switch parties looking for the main chance to acquire power and without regard to any ideological base except (as noted) emphases on anti-communist sentiments, the ideological premise that defined the state in contrast to the views of the North Korean regime, which was regarded as the ‘other’ and toward which antipathy was directed.<sup>24</sup>

As Doh C. Shin wrote:

For decades, political leaders, such as Kim Young Sam, Kim Dae Jung, and Kim Jong Pil, have repeated the same cycle of founding, dissolving, re-establishing, and renaming their own political parties at will. During this period, members of these parties had to faithfully follow the guidance and leadership of the party bosses. Like a father in a traditional Korean family who, alone, makes all the important decisions, every party boss exclusively controls the nomination of his party candidates for each and every electoral district of the National Assembly.<sup>25</sup>

As part of entourage politics within the Confucian political structure, in which the template for politics has been the patriarchal family in which the father as head virtually speaks ex cathedra, a sense of orthodoxy seems required. Compromise, an essential attribute of the

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22 Park Kwan-Yong, ‘More Difficult Change than Revolution, and the Presidential Secretary,’ in Sung Deuk Hahm, ed., *The Kim Young Sam Presidency: Success and Failure* (In Korean), (Seoul: Nanam Publishing House, 2001), p. 83. The author was secretary to president Kim Young Sam. Those close to a number of presidents have commented that, although the cabinet may debate policies, when the president reaches a decision, there is no further debate. This led, for example, to Kim Dae Jung’s insistence on an early visit to President Bush in March 2001, before that administration was ready and against the informal advice of the State Department, with results generally regarded as disastrous.

23 One of the remarkable examples of the sacrifice of principle for expediency was the alliance of Kim Dae Jung, the most liberal of all previous presidents, with Kim Jong Pil, arch enemy for many years, and the political merger of the extreme right with the moderate left, with the objective of getting Kim Dae Jung elected president, as the regional following of Kim Jong Pil in the Chungchong provinces was important to supplement Kim Dae Jung’s overwhelming position in the Cholla area. Kim Jong Pil was founder of the KCIA, which once (perhaps twice) later tried to assassinate Kim Dae Jung.

24 See Roy Grinker, *Korea and Its Futures: Unification and the Unfinished War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998).

25 Doh C. Shin, *Mass Politics and Culture in Democratizing Korea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1999), p. 180.

democratic processes, becomes more difficult because it is destructive of the moral authority of the father-leader, who must care for his family-people.<sup>26</sup> This is supplemented by obligations on the part of the family (or people) to the father (leader). There is virtually almost no 'free' voting in the National Assembly; one votes as one's party leadership determines. This is a concomitant element of personalized loyalty, and with this goes personal moral responsibility for his policies and his actions as well as those of his family—thus the corruption of the sons of leaders or presidents become exceedingly important (witness Presidents Kim Young Sam's, Kim Dae Jung's, and Chun Doo Hwan's children's corruption scandals and the questionable draft exemptions of the sons of presidential candidate Lee Hoi Chang). Thus follow attempts by all Korean regimes (even those titularly democratic) to control the media, feed authorized information to the press, limit their access to previously approved materials, and induce orthodoxy. The concept of a 'loyal opposition' becomes an oxymoron since loyalty is by definition personalized. Political discourse is full of terms defining opponents (including those from different factions within the same party) as 'impure' or 'ideologically polluted,' thus implying only the speaker is untarnished. 'As discussed earlier, political opposition had [in traditional Confucian society] no legitimate place in a society molded by the influence of Confucianism; under the old system it was considered as something inherently immoral and illegitimate. Such a society inevitably developed a kind of political culture that restrained competitive politics.'<sup>27</sup>

The Korean political party is thus the outgrowth of such a system. The party does not train future leaders, but rather one forms a new party if one loses the nomination in a previous one. One does not hesitate to change parties since there has been no ideological criterion for membership. The effective disappearance of Kim Dae Jung's Millennium Democratic Party, which he said was to last at least fifty years, and the rise of Roh Moo Hyun's Uri Party is a recent case in point. Since independence, many have charged that parties have 'bought' new members by encouraging them to join. In addition, political polling in Korea has shown that voters have little recognition of party differences, but vote on three criteria: on the personal basis of the party leader, on his/her place of origin or identity, or against a government that they feel is somehow acting inappropriately or is incompetent or arrogant in some manner. In comparison with nine Eastern European countries, Korea (1993) was lowest in public perceptions that parties offer different policies (25 percent), serve the interests of the public (27 percent), and provide an opportunity to participate in politics (57 percent).<sup>28</sup>

It is evident, however, that political parties even after political liberalization in 1987 failed to capture the trust of the Korean people.<sup>29</sup> The 1997 Korea Democracy Survey indicated that the level of trust in Korean political parties was very low. Only 1.0 percent gave much trust to them, 19.1 percent trusted them somewhat, but 47.3 percent did not trust them very much, and 31.8 percent did not trust them at all. Trust in the National Assembly as an institution (obviously

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26 One eminent Korean said that Koreans would rather surrender than compromise, for then at least one's moral integrity remains intact. See David I. Steinberg, *Stone Mirror. Reflections on Contemporary Korea* (New York: Eastbridge, 2003).

27 Chi-Young Pak, *Political Opposition in Korea, 1945-1960* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1980), p. 18.

28 Shin, *Mass Politics and Culture*, p. 191.

29 The following is from Doh Chull Shin. 'The Dynamics of Democratization in Korea.' The Korea Democracy Barometer Survey. Honolulu, East-West Center POSCO Fellow Report, December 2000, p. 17.

composed of those in political parties) was equally low: 0.8 percent, 21.4 percent, 45.4 percent, and 31.6 percent respectively. Ironically, there was far more trust placed in the state's coercive forces—the military and the police, raising important questions of the deepening of democracy.

At the same time that the populace mistrusted a party system based on entourage politics, they also mistrusted a party system with strong party ideology. In a 1999 Korea Democracy Barometer Survey, only 8.4 percent strongly approved of forming new political parties pursuing definite policies, 24.8 percent approved somewhat 24.8; 34.7 percent somewhat disapproved, and 20.9 percent strongly disapproved. The respondents, however, by over three to one wanted the opening of the selection of party candidates.<sup>30</sup>

### **III. Ideological Elements of Earlier Party Politics**

For the purposes of this paper, we may define 'ideology' as a strongly held belief or system of beliefs, the adherence to which is mandated or encouraged by a leader, group, institution, or government, and in violation of which there are legal or social sanctions or penalties. Han Sungjoo noted that although ideology may be a 'myth,' it has three characteristics: an extra-rational, emotional commitment; an action-orientation; and a simplification of reality.<sup>31</sup>

In one sense, ideological politics are nothing new in South Korea. They have been instituted on the right and the left from independence with remarkable rigidity, but attempts from the left, beginning with liberation in 1945, were met with strong opposition from the U.S. military occupation authorities for the three years after liberation, and thereafter by various Korean governments. Under a number of legal guises, but especially the National Security Law in its various permutations since 1948, the state suppressed the left and ideologies related to it. Even those anti-communists who wanted the elimination of that law or its liberalization (and only about two percent of those arrested under that law were accused of espionage—it was a law essentially against dissidents) faced a 'catch 22' situation. Since the North demanded the canceling of the law, those in the South who were against it on human rights grounds could be accused of violating its provisions by agreeing with North Korea.

The result was an ideology of the right that not only prohibited the advocacy of communism or anything favorable about North Korea, but any unauthorized contact with that state or its people, reading proscribed materials on communism, or even criticizing the social system of South Korea, which seemed an effort to stamp out even democratic socialism.<sup>32</sup> Except for small groups (often students) that demonstrated against the state, and had earlier support from some of the population because the latter equated such actions as against the authoritarian regimes in the South, ideological rigidity was pronounced. When in 2004 the government Uri Party attempted to eliminate the National Security Law, some columnists felt

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.18.

<sup>31</sup> Sungjoo Han, 'Consensus or Polarization? Ideology as an Explanation of South Korean Politics.' Paper presented as the annual Association for Asian Studies meeting, March 1971, Washington, D.C.

<sup>32</sup> The extremes to which this prohibition went were so pronounced that one could not play concert music composed during the period of the Soviet Union (e.g., Shostakovich) without being subject to this law. For many years the U.S. refused to sign an extradition treaty with South Korea because of this law. When one was finally signed, those charged under that law were excluded from extradition.

this was threatening the very identity of the South Korean people and government.

The Cold War started early in Korea. Immediately upon the U.S. occupation of what was to become South Korea (south of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel), the U.S. military government began the systematic elimination of the influence of people's committees that had left-leaning proclivities. A wide variety of such organizations were suppressed as the U.S. moved to ensure that the veteran anti-Japanese advocate who had been exiled in the United States, Syngman Rhee, was able to assume power through elections.<sup>33</sup> Rhee was an autocrat portrayed as a democrat in the U.S. press as part of the 'free world' and as antithetical to the communist regimes.<sup>34</sup>

A variety of opponents and moderate left leaders met mysterious deaths, while others were incarcerated (some even executed) under what today seem to be most questionable justifications. Left or liberal parties were formed, but did not last long or attain any significant electoral following. They were harassed, if not banned outright. A Progressive Party was formed in 1956 in the Syngman Rhee period, but the party registration was cancelled in 1958 with the arrest of its leader, and his execution.<sup>35</sup> During the Chang Myon period (1960-61), there were short-lived leftist parties: such as the People's Socialist Party and the Korea Socialist Party. After 1963, a United Socialist Party and a People's Party existed, but never won an election and were politically neutralized by an authoritarian government.<sup>36</sup>

There is much speculation over the causes of this floating political world, which was devoid of strong programmatic emphases, at least in the campaign phases. Part of the causes may relate to the autocratic governments for almost two generations that polarized both those in power who wanted simply to hold on to it, and the entourages of such leaders whose positions depended on the leader's retaining power, since such power was personalized. Those who sought power simply coalesced against the government, rather than to formulate positive messages. Predictably, should any government party be in favor of some activity, the opposition would automatically oppose it. Campaigns often focused against those in power with negative messages,

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33 For a detailed study of this period, see Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, Volume I and II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981 & 1990).

34 For a variant positive view of Rhee, as well as subsequent presidents, as leaders, see Choong-Nam Kim, *Leadership for Nation Building: Korean Presidents from Syngman Rhee to Kim Dae Jung*. Unpublished manuscript, 2004.

35 The U.S. observed the trial of Cho Pong-am, but seemed to make no public protest. The essential dilemma for the U.S. in Korea in its attempts to further democracy and human rights (an essentially lower priority than security), was whether to go public in its criticisms of the South government, thus indirectly giving the North an additional stick with which to beat the South, and to cause a negative backlash of the South's autocratic rulers. See David I. Steinberg, "U.S. Policy and Human Rights in the Republic of Korea: The influence of Policy or the Policy of Influence," in Debra Liang-Fenton, ed., *Implementing U.S. Human Rights Policy. Agendas, Policies, Practices* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2004).

36 See Ryu Kwang-Jin, *Comparative Analysis of the Platforms and Policies of Korea's Reformist Parties* (Hanguk Hyukshinchungdang ui Chunggang.Chungchek Bikyoyonku). For a review of some of the political party tensions culminating in the 2004 elections see David I. Steinberg, 'The Evolution of the Political Party System and the Future of Party Politics in the Republic of Korea,' in Alexandre Mansourov, ed., *A Turning Point: Democratic Consolidation in the Republic of Korea and Strategic Readjustment in the ROK-U.S. Alliance* (Honolulu: Asian-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2005). There were accusations in the 1960s that the government party actually sponsored and paid for opposition parties to split the opposition vote. These parties were known as *sakura*, the Japanese for cherry blossoms, perhaps because of their ephemeral flowering.

such as charging corruption or other misuses of power. The lack of Korean political party programs, according to some, is because Korea did not have religious, class, or rural-urban splits to polarize politics around ideology as in West.<sup>37</sup>

One of the cardinal elements of political parties has been their regional focus. The era of the ‘three Kims’ of Kim Dae Jung, Kim Young Sam, and Kim Jong Pil brought with them intense political party partisanship based on the province of origin—Cholla, Kyongsang, and Chungchong respectively. The period of Syngman Rhee was different, but under Park Chung Hee, Chun Doo Hwan, and Rho Tae Woo, the Kyongsang provinces benefited from state largesse and appointments. It is evident that those from the Cholla region felt discrimination when Kyongsang groups were in power. Although many writers have observed the dire effects of such alignments, the origins of such loyalties may rest not with regionalism per se, but with the entourage and personal loyalties in which the critical relationships are usually established at the high school level, which then translate into obvious regional orientations. President Roh Moo Hyun, although not from the Cholla provinces, was able to win their support in the 2002 presidential election through the support of former President Kim Dae Jung.

What is now different, however, is the *institutionalized tension* between the now traditional entourage system and the ideology of the left. Entourages continue, although modified within the context of the growth of democratic institutions. The ideology of the right has been marginalized with the end of the Cold War and the perceived (at least in South Korea if not in the United States) of the diminished threat from the North because of its economic implosion and famine during the 1990s following the death of Kim Il Sung.

#### **IV. Liberalization of 1987 and Its Effect on Political Parties**

June 29, 1987 was a momentous event in the history of Korean political life. The state was faced with growing and resolute massive demonstrations in the streets and the specter of the 1988 Olympics a year away that, had the disturbances continued, might have to be moved from Seoul to the great disgrace of the entire nation. The United States, in its most effective statements in favor of democracy since independence, effectively precluded the Korean state from using its military option to suppress the people. The government then acceded to the wishes of the people for political reform. The direct election of the president, the freeing of Kim Dae Jung, the opening of the Korean press, the reinauguration of local government autonomy and elections, and the writing of a new constitution that catalogued the rights of the citizenry were all proclaimed. The government claimed this was a magnanimous gesture on its part, although the people knew that they had forced a nonviolent ‘people power’ revolution on the state on the example of the Philippines the year before.

If the Student Revolution of April 19, 1960 was the first mass ‘revolution’ following independence, June 29, 1987 was the second. It had six profound effects on the political process, some of which only reached fruition some years later. First was the change in the presidential

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37 Larry Diamond, ‘Consolidating Democracy in South Korea.’ Honolulu: East-West Center POSCO Fellow Report. September 1999. Pp. 12-13.

election system from an indirect election, a controlled travesty of ‘democracy,’ to the direct election of the president. This was a critical factor in the development of political parties for it made the ‘vortex’ element of political recruitment (to use Henderson’s terminology) more forceful, for now one had the possibility of becoming president, and not simply a member of the National Assembly. Second, it allowed the growth of civil society, those organizations autonomous of the state, which had been controlled, suppressed, or monitored by the government.<sup>38</sup> Third was the rebirth of local autonomy (which was eliminated in 1961 and although mandated in the new constitution of 1987 did not take place for more than half a decade thereafter) allowed the eventual development of local political constituencies that could affect the future of party development.<sup>39</sup> Fourth, the freeing of labor to strike and organize with less restrictive controls (although as we have seen its ability to engage in the political process more directly was still circumscribed) sparked mobilization efforts that resulted in a massive increase in such strikes. Fifth, the media was also freed from some constraints, although all governments have and continue to attempt to influence political and other reporting. Finally, the freeing of Kim Dae Jung to participate in politics once again set in motion political organizations that eventually resulted in his election to the presidency in 1996. June 1987 was therefore a cardinal event in the political development of Korea.

## **V. Party Programs: The Sunshine Policy, Its Aftermath, and Its Effect on Party Ideology**

That political parties had less than meaningful platforms does not mean that after elections, presidents did not engage in sometimes extensive changes in either domestic or foreign policy or both after being elected. President Park Chung Hee initiated a social revolution designed to restructure total societal leadership from the village to industry, education, and the social prestige of the *yangban* (traditional gentry). President Roh Tae Woo began ‘*Nordpolitik*,’ opening up to the communist states (except North Korea). In addition to the real-name bank accounts and the destruction of *Hanahoe* (mentioned above), President Kim Young Sam started the *saegyehwa* (globalization) policy to push Korea’s export capacity and position in international affairs. Presidents Kim Dae Jung and Roh Moo Hyun have also adopted new policies, as noted below.

A major position that became a program, in fact became the hallmark of the Kim Dae Jung administration, was the Sunshine Policy.<sup>40</sup> Named after the Aesop fable, it was designed to entice North Korea into a more open and revisionist position by engagement. The details and

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38 There is an extensive literature and debate on the issue of civil society and its origins in Korea, but however one traces its beginnings and development, there seems little question that the 1987 revolution was a critical element in its growth. For one view of that date’s importance, see David I. Steinberg, ‘Human Rights and Civil Society in Korea: The Influence of Orthodoxy and Ideology,’ *Korea Journal*, Fall 1997. (Also in *Sasang Journal* [in Korean] 1996).

39 As power is personalized, sharing it is in effect losing it, and as this applies to individuals, it also applies to institutions, so central governments are often reluctant to share authority with provincial or regional authorities. This has been the case in Korea where even after some local autonomy and elections were instituted, through fiscal support, control of the coercive powers of the state, and bureaucratic placements the central government maintained considerable control.

40 President Kim’s first task was to salvage the economic ship of state that had been virtually sunk in the Asian financial crisis of 1997, and which at the close of his career President Kim Young San did not cope.

appraisal of that policy may be found in many sources,<sup>41</sup> but the importance of it in South Korean political party terms was that this engagement policy became a vital ideological position both of the Kim administration and the Roh Moo Hyun government that followed. Although many Koreans of all political persuasions believed that some form of engagement with the North was desirable, the degree to which both Kim and Roh supported the North with assistance (and overlooked their excesses in fields such as human rights) has served to become salient in the development of ideological stances during the 21st century. There is evidence of some disillusionment with the degree of support to the North, as it has instituted little in reciprocal positive actions. Polls indicated that shortly after the June 2000 summit, about 87 percent of the people in August supported the policy, but this fell to 49 percent in February 2001, and then to 34 percent in June 2001.<sup>42</sup>

That polarization has brought with it a corollary ideological position—the degree to which the United States should be important in peninsular policies. President Roh, having spent his early career as a human rights lawyer, had earlier expressed his concerns about U.S. policy. This first concerned the U.S. role in the South, and more recently in the North. He has attempted carefully to define a relationship with the U.S. that does not appear to be subordinate to U.S. power while at the same time acknowledging the need for the U.S. friendship (Illustrated by sending some 3,600 troops to Iraq, for example). The opposition, the Grand National Party (GNP), has been far more conciliatory toward the U.S. Each has its own elite structure; broadly, President Roh's Uri ('We') Party has in influential positions those who were dissidents and activists against the authoritarian governments, were often incarcerated, and were internally educated, while the opposition Grand National Party is closer to the U.S. and has a more internationally oriented elite structure, and has drawn support from former administration (Park Chun, Roh, and Kim Young Sam) members. Although neither party is closely knit ideologically, the overall differences in approaches have become evident and are significant.<sup>43</sup>

In a survey conducted in June-August 2004, the self-identification of National Assembly members who characterized themselves as 'liberal' more than doubled over the previous Assembly: 45 percent said they were liberal and 20 percent conservative. Only 35 percent claimed to be moderates, in contrast to 62 percent in the previous Assembly. In the Uri Party, 71 percent identified themselves as being progressives, compared to 4 percent conservative. In contrast, the opposition Grand National Party was composed of 38 percent conservatives, 12 percent liberal, and the remainder moderates.<sup>44</sup>

The Uri Party, with a slim majority in the National Assembly at this writing, is in the dominant position. Its orientation will profoundly affect the internal dynamics of Korean politics

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41 For example, Chung-in Moon and David Steinberg, eds. *Kim Dae Jung Government and Sunshine Policy: Promises and Challenges* (Washington, DC and Seoul: Georgetown University and Yonsei University Press, 1999).

42 Choong Nam Kim, 'The Sunshine Policy and Its Impact on South Korea's Relations with Major Powers.' *Korean Observer*, Vol. 35, No. 4, Winter 2004. (Institute of Korean Studies). p. 589.

43 Of significance is the fact that the U.S. fully expected that Lee Hoi Chang of the Grand National Party would defeat Roh in the 2002 presidential election, and on the former's pre-election visit to Washington in January 2002 gave him unprecedented access (to the vice president, for example), a highly unusual event.

44 Hakjoon Kim, 'Recent Trends Surrounding the Two Koreas and Their Impacts on the Inter-Korean Relations (May to December 2004).' SAIS-Illmin Conference on the U.S.-Korea Alliance and the Future of Northeast Asia. December 6-7-2004, Washington, D.C. Mr. Kim is the President and Publisher of Dong- Ilbo. The survey was conducted by Choongang Ilbo and the Korean Political Science Association.

and foreign policy. One party, however, that does not now seem ideologically split and has had a coherent platform, and that has emerged from the political penumbra of obscurity in the April 2004 National Assembly elections, is the Democratic Labor Party, to which we will now turn. Although it definitely is a minority party, its position may presage political attitudes that may become more important. It exemplifies the rise of the left to a greater degree than heretofore, is relatively unexamined in the English-language literature on Korean political parties, and thus is given greater attention here.

## VI. The Democratic Labor Party (DLP) and Its Development

The imprecise use of various terms, such as ‘left-wing,’ ‘reformist,’ ‘progressive,’ etc. to describe the moderate, non-communist, left of the political spectrum no doubt causes concerns among those who wish greater precision in delineation. Such precision is difficult, because the terms are often used in accordance with the predilections of the commentator. One study, however, lists a number of generalized characteristics of the platforms of such parties. They are generally democratic, highly nationalistic, and humanistic and advocate ‘a mixed economy or democratically planned economic model that increases welfare, encourages fair participation of all people in production processes, and ensures economic freedom.’ They advocate a state welfare system, are anti-imperialist, and are against dictatorships of any kind. They also call for an independent foreign policy and question U.S. prominence on the peninsula.<sup>45</sup> These shared concepts, of course, have and will continue to differ in emphases depending on the party and on the time.

There had been various permutations of left-wing political parties in Korea, especially after political liberalization in 1987. For example, the People’s Party was founded in March 1988, a People’s Victory 21 Party founded late 1990s, a Youth Progressive Party founded November 29, 1998, and a Green Peace Party. The local elections of 2002, however, became an important milestone in left-wing politics in Korea. The Socialist Party was essentially eliminated in those 2002 local elections. It failed, over all receiving only 1.59 percent of votes, and less than one percent of the Seoul vote.

Little noticed in the local elections, however, was the surprise showing of the Democratic Labor Party. That election was the beginning of growth of the Democratic Labor Party (DLP), which had only been established in January 2000. It fielded 211 local candidates, capturing two heads of local government, 11 council members of major cities and provinces, and 32 council members of local governments. It received 8.13 percent of the total vote, virtually throughout the whole country, and became the third party in the country in terms of popularity. It also received 14 percent of the votes in the Honam (Cholla) region (the Kim Dae Jung stronghold) and became the second party in that area, and 28.7 percent in Ulsan and 10 percent in Youngnam (Kyongsang) region. Although it was only around for two years, and became the country’s third party; it thus was not a regional party.<sup>46</sup>

Why did the DLP do reasonably well? There was dissatisfaction with the major parties

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45 Ryu Kwang-Jin, ‘Comparative Analysis of the Platforms and Policies of Korea’s Reformist Parties.’

46. Cho Hyun-Yon, ‘June 13 Local Elections and the Outlook of the 16th Presidential Election: Democratic Labor Party Perspective’ *Political Criticism* (Chongchi Bipyong). 2 (2002): 29-60.

(44.0 percent according to a party survey), a belief that the DLP represented the ‘peoples’ voice’ (18.5 percent), hope for a progressive party (15.5 percent).<sup>47</sup> Some attribute the DLP’s relative success in the 2002 local elections to the introduction of the proportional representation system based on party ballots.<sup>48</sup> Although the DLP became the third party in 2002 local elections while Socialist Party failed, the DLP has problems if it is to expand. It is still not a mass party, but is dependent on its leaders.

The DLP received organizational support from the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU),<sup>49</sup> but not total support from its members, and did not do that well with the rival Korean Federation of Trade Unions (FKTU), which was close to the Korea Social Democratic Party. In order to expand, it must arrange to bridge the gap between the two unions and also attract a non blue-collar constituency. As noted above, union membership has dropped significantly, and national power cannot be attained with the sole support of labor unions; the constituency of the DLP must broaden to achieve more prominence. Even if union membership has dropped, there has been the development of white-collar unions in service industries and in education, for example. These organizations could help expand the base of the DLP and the teachers’ union is already closely allied with the DLP.

Why did not the left do well earlier, between liberalization in 1987 and the late 1990s? The answer may lie personally in Kim Dae Jung. He had been an advocate of a ‘mass participatory economy,’ and had written on that subject in 1985. To many, he represented not only a geographic focus, but also virtually a class and worker orientation. Any political party that tried to mobilize without his leadership was bound to suffer and could not compete against his influence. He had, in effect, almost a monopoly on the working class orientation if not on their ballots.

Striking, and possibly related to the later better showing of the leftist Democratic Labor Party (DLP), was the development of the *minjung* (masses) movement in the 1970s and 1980s. It was against the authoritarian government of the period, and sought to return Korea to its origins and pre-Confucian roots. It was based on a vigorous nationalism and against the Korean establishment and the American connection. Liberalization and the movement from authoritarian governance in 1987 took some momentum away from this intellectual movement, but it had substantial appeal and laid an intellectual base for a more formidable role for labor. If the predominant Western social movement over the past two hundred years was the proletarianization of society (as some literature contends), in no other place was this accomplished so fast as in Korea since 1960.<sup>50</sup> The *minjung* movement drew from, and appealed to, this newly important element of Korean society.

The Korean repressive labor and economic system produced an intense feeling of grievance and resentment against the industrial system ‘...resulting in a militancy unequalled in either China or Japan. This has produced *han* (lingering and cumulative resentment), which was

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47. Hyun-Yon Cho, ‘Local Elections and the Outlook of the 16th Presidential Election: The Democratic Labor Party Perspective.’ (In Korean)

48 Sung-Hun Jung, ‘Analyzing the Democratic Labor Party’s Rise and the Socialist Party’s Failure.’

49 The KCTU was formed in 1983 by 14 dissident unions, and was called the National Federation of Labor Unions, but later changed its name to the KCTU. Oh, op. cit., p.201. On the other hand, Koo (op. cit, p.179) notes that the NCTU was formed Jan. 22, 1990 with 456 unions, 160,000 union members, representing 8.6% of union members.

50 Kenneth M. Wells, ed., *South Korea’s Minjung Movement. The Culture and Politics of Dissidence* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

‘a language of spiritual resistance’ not a language of class.<sup>51</sup> But the *minjung* movement is said to be the politics of *han*.<sup>52</sup> With general improvement in labor conditions in the country, will this *han* diminish, and with it the solidarity of resistance and militancy--thus the appeal of labor-oriented politics? The evidence is not yet in. The financial crisis of 1997 may have had a positive result in the appeal of the left. There is no question that income disparities rose, as did unemployment, and the social safety net provided by the state was deemed inadequate even by the government. Criticism of the *chaebol* (conglomerates--the equivalent of the zaibatsu in Japan) has been widespread, and previously they had been vehemently anti-union.

The problem for the DLP has been that most Koreans self-identify themselves as members of the middle class (some estimates before the 1997 financial crisis were up to three-quarters of the population), and there is little working class consciousness. As democracy and political change has been established in Korea, there seems less interest in militant organizations and activities. The DLP must also attract the members of civil society groups to it, but is effectively separated from them. Some civil society groups have identified with the Green Peace Party and to some degree with the Socialist Party. Civil society is one of the most dynamic growth areas and any minority party to do well needs to make substantial inroads on its diverse membership. The future of the DLP as a major contender for power, in contrast to its role as a third party balancer that could align with a liberal agenda of the Uri Party, lies in appealing to the nationalism of civil society organizations, an emotion shared with the DLP and which has been demonstrated to be very strong. These groups tend to be liberal, anti-establishment because the state often does not live up to its promises or the expectations of many of its supporters, and thus could be allies of the DLP. Of course, civil society organizations could form their own parties, and thus undercut the DLP’s reach and potential.

Virtually all observers of the 2002 presidential election in Korea have commented on the importance of that event and its remarkable campaign and outcome that elected Roh Moo Hyun as president. The salience of the youth vote, the role of the internet and alternative news sources and television debates, the extent to which anti-American sentiment influenced the outcome, the bizarre role of Chung Mong Jun and his pro- and then anti-Roh stance, the end of the three-Kim era, the lackluster campaign of the opposition candidate Lee Hoi Chang, and the ‘primaries’ for choosing the candidate all have been studied, and all have been important. The primaries, more accurately party caucuses, were an important innovation, but in no manner affected the entourage aspects of the political process, for the chosen leader then became the entourage leader.

Kwon Young-ghil was the DLP candidate. A graduate of Seoul National University and a former reporter, he was a leader of the progressive movement. He participated in the presidential debates because his party had received over 5 percent of the votes in the 2002 local elections, thus making him eligible for state support. Kwon received only 3.9 percent of all electoral votes. ‘Many presumed that this was because after Chung [Mong-Jun] withdrew his support for Roh, the [potential] DLP supporters did not vote for Kwon and chose a much stronger contentent (sic) Roh to make him beat the conservative Lee.’<sup>53</sup>

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51 Koo, op. cit, p. 137.

52 Choi Chungmoo, ‘The Minjung Culture Movement and the Construction of Popular Culture in Korea.’ In Wells, op. cit, p.117.

53 Kim Yong-Ho, ‘Political Significance of the 2002 Presidential Election Outcome and Political Prospects for the Roh Administration,’ *Korea Journal*, Vol. 43 (Summer 2003), p. 239.

The Democratic Labor Party presaged its strength in the 2004 National Assembly election by its showing in the 2002 elections. Changes in the voting regulations, which allowed voters to choose both a candidate and separately a party, changed the equation in 2004. The Democratic Labor Party, which had never elected a national representative was able to do so, and with proportional representation ended up with ten National Assembly seats. Equally important, it received about 13 percent of the total vote nationwide. This is a significant shift, because with the very slim majority that the Uri Party held at the close of 2004 (although the usual pattern has been for both members and candidates to switch parties to reap the rewards of office), the Uri Party may well need Democratic Labor Party support, which it is most likely to receive on votes that involve social issues or those that relate to perceptions of U.S. hegemony on the peninsula. Growing income disparities between the wealthy and the poor may give that party increased salience in the society, although most people, it seems, continue to consider themselves to be middle class.

Growing affluence in Korean society and increasing levels of education should theoretically mean that the interest in and support for a political party based on identification with labor should decrease. This seems to have been the Western experience. But in the Korea case, the social and economic expectations of the rewards that higher levels of education would bring have not kept pace with reality, thus increasing frustration with the 'system,' and affluence masks growing income disparities and increased personal debt. These, together with appeals to nationalism that has become ever more relevant given Korea's heightened dependence on international trade and cultural globalization, could have the reverse effect and strengthen the DLP. If there is a rising 'stealth curve' of anti-American sentiment that is rooted in Korean nationalism and is only exacerbated (but not caused) by incidents involving U.S. forces in Korea, as we believe, then any party that captures this sentiment is likely to have a built-in constituency that can provide additional support to it. The DLP platform, as articulated through its web site and publications, represent a coherent, classically left, agenda in both foreign and domestic policy. The party advocates an essentially socialist economy with greater worker rights, and the elimination of the influence of the chaebol. It has strong elements of Marxism and is intensely nationalistic in tone. (See the Appendix for platform excerpts.) Mr. Kwon has been articulate in his views on the causes of anti-American sentiment, and advocates moving significantly away from the sway of U.S. influence.<sup>54</sup> If, as these writers believe, this sentiment is growing, capitalizing on it could win the DLP more influence in the society.

## **VII. The Tension Between Entourage and Ideology**

President Roh's Uri Party also represents a shift in the political spectrum toward the left. Many members of that party, reflecting the profound changes in the society that have given youth a far more prominent role than heretofore,<sup>55</sup> are more nationalistic, more accommodating toward North Korea, more skeptical about U.S. policies both regarding the North and in the

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<sup>54</sup> For Kwon's views on anti-American sentiment, see an interview in the introduction to David I. Steinberg, ed., *Korean Attitudes Toward the United States: Changing Dynamics* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004).

<sup>55</sup> One prominent Uri Party official before the election remarked that since youth were in command, the elderly should not bother to vote. He was forced to resign his position.

South, are less concerned about North Korea as a nuclear power or threat, and have less international experience and/or overseas education.

The composition of Korean politics has markedly shifted toward an institutional ideological dichotomy more than at any previous time since independence (although the 1945-48 period under U.S. military occupation was more severely polarized). With the DLP representing a relatively hard-line left-wing political perspective and having attained relative political prominence, and the Uri Party composed of an amorphous body of opinion from the moderate left to the more pronounced left in the spectrum, the contrast with the generally conservative Grand National Party (GNP) is stark.

The tension between entourage political parties and those more ideologically oriented is in part exemplified by differences between various groups over what should be done about the National Security Law and the designation of North Korea as the 'main enemy'. Although entourage politics is also exemplified by this dispute, it is essentially based on a schism in ideological orientation between the left and the right: whether to eliminate the law while placing anti-espionage legislation in the criminal code or retain it in some form (with egregiously discriminatory elements eliminated), whether North Korea is still the main enemy and how might the state justify expenditures on defense if that characterization is eliminated. This has resulted in the postponed publication of the Ministry of Defense's official white paper on defense policy and strategy while the government was trying to sort out how to define North Korea. Some say that elimination of the law, for example, could allow some in South Korea to form legally authorized groups to study the *juche* philosophy of North Korea. Conservatives, especially among those older, have editorially complained that the identity of the South might be compromised by the elimination of anti-communist and anti-North Korea rhetoric in law and official publications, and rather than the South 'absorbing' the North because of the former's economic dominance, the North might absorb the South through ideological infiltration.<sup>56</sup>

The Roh administration has seemingly attempted to remake the elite structure of South Korean society since its inauguration in February 2003. These moves have been multiple. The replacement of the bureaucratic elite with those less oriented toward the U.S. The attempt to develop the 'truth' about those who collaborated with the Japanese as announced by President Roh in his Liberation Day speech on August 15, 2004 (North Korea purged Japanese collaborators but South Korea did not, and many in the traditional elite have families that collaborated with the Japanese). The concept to move the capital from Seoul to the provinces and thus negatively affecting the concentrated structure of wealth, which is largely in real estate, was announced but stopped by the Constitutional Court. The idea of eliminating or moving Seoul National University (the Oxbridge or Ivy League of Korea) to broaden the intellectual elite was advocated. The government has also sought the 'democratization' of private schools, which would give the decidedly leftist (and DLP supporter) teachers' union more influence. The elimination of the National Security Law (previously noted) was another element of these proposed changes. Finally, the attempt to limit the influence of the three largest newspapers, which are conservative and have been against President Roh's policies, is evidence of this profound attempted shift to remake the elite structure of South Korea. Not since Park Chung

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<sup>56</sup> Some 10 percent of the South Korean population consider their places of origin (kr. *kohyang*, lit., old home) in North Korea, although perhaps only several hundred thousand are still alive who personally fled from the North. Those people understandably are likely to be more anti-communist than many others in the population.

Hee's 1961 coup has such a comprehensive effort been made to reformulate the power structure of South Korean society.<sup>57</sup>

Entourage politics are likely to remain a quintessential element of Korean politics. But that factor should not obscure the likelihood that Korean politics will also be influenced by ideology, which may continue to grow and has found acceptable institutional homes, and could affect the political process in the South. This is the ideology of the left, because since the end of the Cold War the right has lost its adamant position. Although no national charismatic left-leader has developed in the South as yet (as Kim Dae Jung was in his earlier days), it is possible that Kwon Young-ghil might evolve into one or that one or several others may develop and who could, then, combine ideology and entourage politics in important combinations that could profoundly affect the Korean society.

The growing role of the left could also have an impact on direct foreign investment, which has been an important element of national growth. Foreign firms have already been concerned with the rigidity and militancy of Korean labor, and if the influence of the DLP were to expand, militancy increase, and labor costs rise, then one might expect a fall off in such investment, which the DLP might well approve, especially if foreign firms were not allowed to buy Korean companies. Just prior to the financial crisis of 1997, Doh C. Shin found in a national survey that the Korean public was against foreigners buying either land or industries, but this was one of the critical recommendations of the IMF and World Bank as part of their bailout stipulations. This issue could become political. Further accommodations with the North or a nuclear North Korea could also scare off potential foreign investors.

The influence of such changes will not be limited to internal Korean agendas, but will also strongly affect foreign policy, and more specifically the position of the United States in relation to the peninsula. Any leader following the one-term presidential rule of Mr. Roh, even if he/she comes from a conservative camp, will likely have to pay more attention to the left on internal policies. The preeminent position of the U.S. may well be under even more scrutiny at that time. In spite of likely and usual official denials by both governments, anti-American sentiment will probably grow as Korean nationalism increases. It is, thus, incumbent on the U.S. to understand the internal power shifts that are underway in the Republic of Korea so that U.S. policies can respond to the new challenges in the Republic of Korea and in the relationship, celebrated by some 51 years of formal alliance. To assume that a leadership shift toward the center or the right would solidify the alliance and relationship would be an error. As Korea deepens its democratic tendencies, any government will have to pay attention to public attitudes.

That alliance has not been without considerable trauma, but is now in inchoate crisis. In part, but only in part, this is a product of important differences in policies toward North Korea and its nuclear danger. Unification, exemplified in the popular song 'Our Wish' (for unification) creates a strong emotional response and is played at many public performances. *Tong'il* (unification) is the most political and emotional word in the Korean language. As one Korean academician said, 'Americans are our friends, but North Koreans are our brothers.' These attitudes affect not only policy toward the North, but toward the United States and Japan as well.

South Korean national security and interests are naturally focused on the Korean

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<sup>57</sup> See David I. Steinberg, 'The Second Social Revolution in South Korea?' *The International Herald Tribune*, November 10, 2004.

peninsula, and then on the region, while those of the United States are first and foremost global, then regional, and finally peninsular. Differences are thus bound to occur. But the U.S. and South Korean longer-range national interests at least overlap. If the U.S. alliance were to atrophy (and the alliance is more than having U.S. troops stationed in South Korea), then Korea might well find it expedient or necessary for closer relationships with either China or Japan, to the detriment of its (and the U.S.' concerns) important balancing position in Northeast Asia. Korea, singular or plural, is an important element to balance the potential rise of any Asian hegemonic power in the region—China or Japan. Even though U.S. and Korean interests are not completely congruent, the need for understanding is both mutual and obvious. South Korean politics will importantly affect international affairs of all of Northeast Asia.

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## APPENDIX

### Democratic Labor Party Platform

[Excerpts]

*Toward a new world of democracy, equality, and liberation*

The Democratic Labor Party will overcome foreign power, realize progressive politics for the people (min-jung) by driving away anti-people political forces, and create a new world of equality and liberation beyond capitalism in which all individuals can live like humans.

Capitalism's contradictory structure exploited the people, including workers, marginalized women, and destroyed the environment. Today's world order, by expanding and deepening the contradiction of capitalism, further exploits the people. The United States, the only hegemonic power after the Cold War, is spreading its influence through imperialist violence and oppression. Moreover, the global destruction of environment as a result of capitalism is threatening the survival of humanity.

Korea's political power is merely a loyal messenger of capital. As long as those who represent the chaebol and transnational capital are in power, the people are politically and economically powerless.

The DLP will create a democratic government whose power lies in the hands of workers and the people,...will struggle for democracy and stand against neo-liberalism. We will completely abolish all national organizations, laws, and institutions that suppress the people. The DLP will overcome the yokes of capitalism and construct a democratic socioeconomic system based on workers and the people. It will restrict private property ownership based on profits and nationalize the means of production so that goods and services essential for life become public goods. Reflecting the limitations of command economies in the past, the Party will utilize the market incentives and promote the economy's efficiency and stability.

The DLP, through fundamental political reforms, will pursue a road to true democracy and liquidate politicians as well as laws, institutions, and systems in the past. The Party will inherit the values of socialism and realize progressive politics through creative practices. The DLP will substantially limit the civil rights of corrupt politicians by banning them permanently from running for elections. The DLP will abolish all oppressive national organizations and thoroughly guarantee human freedom and creativity. The Party will abolish the National Security Law and the National Intelligence Service. It will also pursue democratic reforms of the military, police, and administrative bodies, while establishing the transparency rules for all national organizations.

The DLP will realize substantive democracy based on political parties and elections. It will construct a transparent, internally democratized political party that works together with the people, not a political party that rules over, or marginalizes, the people. It will establish a political party system based on ideology and policy. It will also establish a democratic

competition structure based on complete proportional representation system.

The DLP will pursue a “democratic economic system” led by workers and the people. This system utilizes market based on the principles of socialist ownership, aimed at promoting economic efficiency, stability, and equal distribution of wealth at the same time. In this system, “democratic participatory corporations” will be introduced. These corporations will be managed by the mass citizens, including the relevant companies’ workers, who own the overwhelming majority of shares and actively participate in the firm management.

The DLP will dismantle the chaebol and expand the activities of democratic participatory corporations. It will confiscate the shares of all chaebol leaders (with compensation using public funds), and convert all the private conglomerates to democratic participatory corporations in which workers and ordinary citizens can share the ownership of companies. The DLP will utilize the market with priority on social adjustments. We will abolish all policies that have protected the monopolist chaebol and suppressed the worker’s basic rights, particularly financial and industrial policies. The DLP also opposes neoliberal government deregulation. The Asian financial crisis took place because of the government’s premature deregulation and liberalization policies, and the neoliberal structural adjustment policies are deepening unemployment and social inequality. The DLP will also democratically organize public finance supported by egalitarian tax systems. In terms of public expenditure, DLP will expand social security programs and public services. It will also ban the chaebol and foreign capital from controlling various financial institutions, and subject these institutions to the supervision of a financial monitoring body controlled by the economic policy committee. The DLP will establish independent and equal foreign economic relations. We will strengthen the national control over trade and capital mobility. The current WTO system, which promotes the unequal economic relations between developed and developing countries, must be revised.

The DLP will resolve the hostile relationship between the two Koreas and firmly establish the basis for unification. We will not only end the old Cold War system on the Korean Peninsula and establish peaceful relations, but build external foundations for unification through the Northeast security cooperation. The DLP will construct a unified country led by the people. We will pursue unification of mutual agreement and reciprocity, not absorption of the North. We will pursue independent and peaceful unification led not by the government or the chaebol, but by the people, who are the greatest victims of Korea’s division. We will promote an awareness that accepts the North as a partner, and put an end to the Cold War structure on the Korean Peninsula. The Party will get rid of not only the remaining Cold War institutions such as the National Security Law that brands North Korea as our enemy but also the Cold War mentality and culture that views the North with hostility. The DLP will promote inter-Korean reconciliation, cooperation, and exchange. In particular, the Party will pursue large-scale food, agriculture, and economic cooperative projects with the North that is currently facing serious food and economic crises. The DLP will end the current Cold War structure on the Korean Peninsula and secure the Northeast security cooperation system. We will sign a tripartite peace agreement among the two Koreas and the United States, (in the short run) reduce the U.S. troops stationed in the South and deploy them to the rear for largely defensive purposes, and then (in the

long run) pursue complete withdrawal of U.S. troops.

The DLP will nullify all of unequal treaties and agreements signed with the United States and other foreign powers that interrupt our reunification and suppress our autonomy, thus creating international relations based on genuine reciprocity and equality. DLP will repeal all of the unequal military treaties and administrative agreements signed with the U.S., dismantle all the nuclear weapons, and force the withdrawal of U.S. troops out of South Korea. The DLP will strive to secure a peace guarantee regime throughout Northeast Asia (including the Korean Peninsula) and the entire Asian region. The DLP will oppose any attempts by certain countries to use the international organizations such as the UN for their imperialist, hegemonic interests, and call for the reforms of international organizations. The UN has always responded to the interests of great powers rather than those of the weaker powers. Thus, in order to democratically and effectively resolve international disputes and promote cooperation, the U.N. should be fundamentally reformed to the direction of allowing more voice of weaker powers. The DLP will oppose participation in any military bloc, and actively support autonomous nonalignment. It will strive to strengthen the voice of the Third World countries and make sure they are not victimized by politics among great powers.

The DLP will establish a new defense system that ends the military confrontation between the South and the North and prepares for the national reunification in the future. We will reduce the proportion of defense budgets from 20% of total government budgets to 5%, converting the saved budgets for education and social welfare programs. Thus, we will redefine “security” as ensuring not only citizens’ safety but their quality of life as well. The DLP will change the current U.S.-ROK relations so as to realize autonomous national defense. We will establish autonomous bilateral relations with the U.S., ending forced purchase of American weapons and diversifying the vendors of weapons. We will also cut off monetary support for the U.S. troops stationed in Korea, and impose rents on the current U.S. bases in Korea. It will reduce arms and build up scientific, modern, and elite military. By negotiating arms reductions with North Korea, we will promote reduction of troops of both Koreas to 300,000 each, and then gradually to 100,000 each. The DLP will build up elite Korean military with substantial defense capabilities and stability, and will reform the current military service system and replace conscription with recruitment of career soldiers. The DLP will repeal the current homeland reserve forces and institute voluntary reserve forces. According to this new institution, the draftee will choose either active or reserve service.

The DLP will guarantee the right to work, social rights to work for women, and establish systems that evaluate women’s contributions to household works. The DLP will reduce working hours to 35 hours per week, ensure safe and comfortable working conditions, will guarantee basic labor rights. The DLP will realize equality and solidarity across workers. The DLP will make sure the working class becomes a significant political force. In order for the workers to become the leaders of history, their self-realization should not be limited to the working place. We will provide institutional devices that guarantee free political activities of workers and encourage workers to participate in state affairs.

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