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# **Evolution of Student Movements in South Korea and Their Impact on the Formation of Korean Democracy**

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## **I. Abstract**

The impact of protest on South Korean democracy has been documented for many decades. Scholars have focused primarily on the Kwangju Uprising and mass protests that swept the nation. They have viewed these movements in relation to topics like labor or North Korea. This thesis asks: how have college-aged student-led protests impacted the shape and formation of Korean democracy? Previous scholarship has viewed the protests in one of two lights: either destructive for South Korean society, or a guiding force championing democratic freedoms. This thesis makes the claim that the student protests acted as both a destructive and transformative force. In this thesis, I examine the ways protests from the 1960s (starting with the removal of Syngman Rhee from office) evolved in each subsequent decade. As they evolved, the protests adapted to the regime in charge at the moment and the socio-political events facing the nation at the time. This cycle continued until the impeachment of President Park Geun Hye 2017. I break down my analysis of the evolution of student protests by decades and then analyze the impact of these protests on the succeeding generations. The conclusion of the thesis shows that college-aged students were a driving force: they determined the direction South Korea moved in the past, and are poised to move South Korea in the future, as today's South Korean students find new issues worth organizing around.

*Keywords:* social movement, student movement, South Korean politics, democracy

## II. Introduction

In the past five years, the world has seen an increase in youth activism ranging from climate change, gun violence, national politics, and sustainability. The motivation from students, both college-aged and in high school, to change the nature of politics and social change has reimagined the scope of generational involvement. South Korea has experienced a similar level of student-led change on the national scale. Within the country exists a strong protest culture that dates back to the Korean monarchy of the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897) through Japanese Imperialism. This history of protesting has made the act of protesting itself benign and a factor that many political theorists believe is not enviable. The desire to use public dissidence rather than democratic channels of voting shows a breakdown in the system. South Korea has experienced decades of mass protests to express outrage at the government with the key to these mass protests being its relationship to college-aged students.

This thesis asks the question of how does college-age student-led protest impact South Korean democracy? And follows up with how has the relationship between the government and the student activist evolved through each regime change. Looking at each decade after liberation from Japanese imperialism, this thesis seeks to make the claim that student-led protests forced the South Korean government to acknowledge the demands for democracy while opening avenues for other forms of social movements to take root in the nation. This conclusion is reached through analysis of each decade's relationship to the government with a multi-decade scope. The focus of this research arises from South Korea's recent impeachment of their president through mass protest which started with an on-campus college student protest. This topic hopes to guide political and social theorists on how to view youth activism as a credible part of social theory and political organization. The focus on South Korea is specific to its long

running history of protest in addition to its transition from soft authoritarianism to formal authoritarianism then finally to democracy. The multiple regime changes allow for better tracking of how each generation of students interacts with the government as none of the presidencies were alike. The potential insights that arise from this thesis is the widespread use of state repression during Park and Chun dictatorships to suppress college students and the evolutionary aspect of the continued protest from democracy.

This thesis is organized first by the literature review then followed up by the case study of South Korean protest history. The literature review takes a historical approach in discussing the scholarship that surrounds each decade. The literature review is organized by decade allowing the most important scholarship impact the work of the thesis. The case study is similarly organized by decade to focus on the generational challenges each student group faced with the regime in charge. The first section tracks the 1960s with the fall of Syngman Rhee during the 4-19 Revolt and the novelty of the students' force in creating revolutionary change. The second section tracks the 1970s with the Park Chung Hee's rise to power and complete suppression of the student movement. This decade saw the implementation of the Yusin Constitution that formalized Park Chung Hee's authoritarian regime. The third section tracks the 1980s with Chun Doo Hwan's military coup and the Kwangju Massacre. The Kwangju Massacre was an aggressive use of force that propelled nation, from all class sectors, to mass protest in 1987. The concluding section for the case study tracks the combined decades of the 2000s and 2010s as the post-democratic era of South Korea changed the method in which student protest organized. This section explores how technology and the students living in the first era of a genuinely democratic state still incorporated the protest methods of earlier decades.

This thesis concludes on analysis of the case study and a final conclusion summarizing the whole the research. The conclusion states that student-led protests formed a new voice and system to channel dissent. The protests created room for larger social movements to exist in a society that was completely controlled by a fear of communism. These protests at times pushed the government to heed their demands like the resignation of Syngman Rhee in 1960, the decision to adopt a civilian constitution in 1987, and the impeachment of Park Geun Hye. In other instances, these protest pushed regimes to invent new methods of state repression in hopes of crushing a voice for change. Altogether this thesis hopes to inform and inspire readers to really create change through activism while understanding a history that has not been shared in many places.

### **III. Literature Review**

#### **A. Overview**

The literature supporting this thesis takes into account the history of each decade's protest methods and supporting factors such as economics, politics, and culture that lead to the formation of these protests. Focused on the larger picture of the South Korean protest culture, much of the literature highlighted in this review centers on how the student protests worked within the confines of South Korean society during that specific decade or time frame. This literature review is organized thematically by decade to mirror the organization of case study subsections and the impact of earlier literature on subsequent case study subsections. This method differs from chronological organization as the individual works will be arranged by its impact on the topic rather than year of release. This thesis, overall, situates itself within the literature as an addition to existing work within this field of subject to create a continuous and chronological focus on the

South Korean student movement and its impact on South Korean democracy. This thesis unlike other research seeks to create a panoramic view of how each decades' student protest impacted subsequent protests and government reaction that allowed for both parties to learn and adjust to new threats.

## **B. Historical Eras**

### **a. Literature on the 1960s...**

In South Korea, the year 1960 marks the beginning of the post-liberation student movements. As the origin for subsequent student movements, the formation of the first post-liberation student movement has been the subject of many articles and research by political scientists and sociologist. Two lenses that occur within this thesis is to look at the limitations and characteristics of social movements within the decade and to define what forces develop protest movements that then evolve into revolution and regime change. Through first lens, Kim Dong Choon looks at how an outbreak, or an “upsurge” as he puts it, was able to happen in a country that was nationally divided and filled with fanatic anticommunist sentiments. In his work, *The Great Upsurge of South Korea's Social Movements in the 1960s*, Kim speculates that in a political condition where socialism or labor movements were not permitted a key limitation of the student movement was the “overloaded” role the students played in political transformation<sup>1</sup>.

This overloaded role first arises through an import of American liberal democracy and the formation of liberalism in politics in the 1950s. The characteristics of South Korean politics during the 1950s conditioned the student movement that evolved into the ‘4-19’ revolt in 1960 and the subsequent student movements against Park Chung Hee’s regime during the mid-1960s.

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<sup>1</sup> Kim, Dong Choon 620

Kim notes that the 1950s for South Korea, post the Korean war, left every sector of society overwhelmed by the feverish anticommunism, the atypical rule of rightist terrorism, irrepressible demonstrations by rightists youth, coupled with the despair and trauma from the losses of the Korean War.<sup>2</sup> This oppressive state turned liberalism into ‘white terror’ where leaders of South Korea were former officials during Japanese colonialism and contributed to the ruthlessness that occurred during the Rhee regime. American-born Cold War liberalism in South Korea created the first characteristic that drove student protest formation to organize against the state mandated oppression of the Rhee regime.

The second characteristic that defines the 1950s South Korea is modernization without industrialization. Kim points South Korea’s economy was entirely dependent on U.S. military economic aid and that the Rhee regime did not have enough ‘hegemonic resources’ to launch an economic development plan. Western social scientists believe industrialization leads to modernization within countries but for post-colonial developing countries this format was not applicable.<sup>3</sup> These countries experienced modernization without adequate industrialization with the growth of cities, communications, and higher education all being typical results. South Korea during the 1950s experienced this as the ratio of urban population grew from 11.4% in the 1940s to 33.2% by the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> South Korea enacted laws of land reform allowing for a more egalitarian system that removed the land-owning class. This new organization in a class-based society created a fervor of upward social mobility that concentrated on a competition to gain social and cultural capital. It’s from this characteristic that the rise in students, pre-industrialization, contributed heavily to the demise of the Rhee regime.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 620

<sup>3</sup> Kim, Dong Choon 621

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.,

The 4-19 movement became the first of many student movements for the 1960s but also in becoming the origin point that subsequent protests evolved from in South Korea. The Rhee regime relied on voter fraud and corruption to win the 1960 Presidential election with results showing twice the necessary votes to win. The revelation of the illegalities of the election prompted mass protests on April 19, 1960, with millions of students and citizens organized together. The 4-19 movement succeeded due to the sheer surprise and force of the students demands for resignation. As the beginning of modern student movement history, 4-19 acts as a nonreplicable event as these students acted as a force that did not exist formally until that moment. Kim points that movement was a sign of division of generational consciousness due education and life post the Korean War.

As a prototype of the student movement, the 4-19 Uprising marked the origin of the contemporary social movements that expanded past student-led social movements. Kim Dong Choon concludes that university students were left to carry out political transformation as the Korean War and national division left other possible groups unavailable or nonexistent. Student activism created the potential for the formation of other social movements in South Korea in a staunchly anticommunist society. A unique claim that Kim makes holds true for the subsequent protests and their focus on politics rather than society as in Western social movements. Kim states that during the 1960s the lack peasant participation in politics and weak labor movements meant that the intellectuals and students represented the voiceless of South Korea pre-industrialization.

The students that take up the mantle of protesting in the decades after the 1960s social movements had 'spiritual resources' that revitalized old left ideology and nationalism. As this is written in 2006, Kim Dong Choon's work takes the origin of social movements up until the

1990s. There is a clear correlation that up until 1987, 4-19 acted as the basis for subsequent protests and how they evolved to bring about democratic reform in 1987. This work unfortunately cannot engage with the last section of the case study as the events that are discussed take place after this publication. The protest movements of 2010s does show a sharp difference of the requirements and structure of protesting post-Korean War and post-democratic reform in South Korea.

The second lens that the 1960s social movements and the 4-19 Uprising are viewed through is analytical account of protest origins with 4-19 as the case study. Kim Quee Young, in her article *From Protest to Change of Regime: The 4-19 Revolt and The Fall of the Rhee Regime in South Korea* in *Social Forces*, looks at the forces that drive protests to transform into revolution that can overthrow a regime. Kim uses Charles Tilly definition of revolutionary that combines “(1) the emergence of rival claims to the state; (2) the commitment to those claims by a significant segment of the citizenry; and (3) the incapacity or unwillingness of rulers to suppress the alternative coalition and/or commitment to its claims.”<sup>5</sup> From this definition, the regime faces a number of potential threats as protests can develop rapidly as state violence increases. Kim states that a regime becomes weak when the relationship between “norms, principles, and rules” becomes increasingly inconsistent. This weakness is especially prevalent in authoritarian regimes as contradicting principles leads to a vulnerability from protesters. The Park regime fell susceptible to the students protests for this reason and despite not being a formal authoritarian, the Rhee regime also feel due to onslaught of student protests.

Kim Quee Young’s intention with her article is to use the main ideas of different theoretical sources to explain the patterns that appear under different local settings when

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<sup>5</sup> Tilly in Kim 1180

opposition forces and authority interact. Kim combines cross-sectional data on cities with time-data on collective action analyzing the origins of protest and the causes and consequences of violent coercion. She uses the 1960 revolt against Syngman Rhee's regime where South Korean students and citizens of major cities protested together as her historical backdrop. Analyzing the different theories on the origins of protest she states that economic deprivation, critical resources, differences in power, and public opinion are all factors that can influence "not only" the origins of protest but also the "context of political conflict and the subsequent expansion of protest." When studying the causes and effects of violent coercion, Kim notes that the possibility of a regime change is likely to escalate into "high-stakes" revolutionary violence. Violent coercion increases the dissidents anger and intensifies the opposition against the regime when it is used to continue state violence. She states that there should be an expected direct causal relationship between violent coercion and revolutionary upheaval, especially in authoritarian states. Kim concludes this section saying that the regime must rule continuously by force, if it can or it will fall.

The next section of her journal article details the fall of the Syngman Rhee regime divided into the first and second waves of protests. The first wave covers from February 28<sup>th</sup> to April 19<sup>th</sup> of 1960, the period before the 4-19 Revolt, with student protesting in the streets against government orders. The finding of a body with a police cannister lodged in the eye socket in the bay around Masan propelled students of Korea University to organize and march on government. The second wave of protest covers from April 20<sup>th</sup> to April 28<sup>th</sup>, post the 4-19 revolt where Syngman Rhee was demanded to resign. Detailing the events of the revolt, Kim Quee Young uses the process model to analyze the events and factors of the 4-19 Revolt. The process model combines the "notion of events and actions as temporally ordered, phenomena with theoretical

concepts that organize and transform temporally conditioned factual disorder into a timeless placeless casual structure.”<sup>6</sup> Through this model, Kim found substantial evidence that the protest begins with economic deprivation and transformed into revolutionary upheaval due to both violent coercion and critical public opinion of government.

Kim Quee Young’s work serves this thesis in first creating a detailed account of the 4-19 revolt and marking these events according to theory on revolutions. As Kim does not consider the 4-19 revolt a revolution due its failure to implant a new regime she does consider the 4-19 critical in the reimagination of protests. This thesis agrees with this sentiment as the 4-19 revolt sparked the belief of citizen driven change within the nation and propelled generations of students to demand accountability and democracy during authoritarian regimes.

### **b. Literature on the 1970s...**

In the aftermath of Park Chung Hee’s seizure of power in 1961, South Korea remained pinned under an authoritarian regime that became known as South Korea’s “dark age.” The interim period of the 1970s plays an important role in the development of the student activism of the 1980s as Park Chung Hee created a legal dictatorship under his Yusin Constitution. In the scholarly work, *Protest Dialectics*, Paul Chang attempts to shed light on several important events that occurred during this “dark” decade. Chang expresses that overall the book is an attempt to contribute to the growing literature on the differential impact of repression on social movements. He divides his work into three parts focusing on different aspects of the 1970s protest movements.

Part I is divided into two chapters that asses the larger political context from which the democracy movement emerged. Chapter One tracks the transformation of Park Chung Hee’s

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<sup>6</sup> Kim, Quee Young; 1191

leadership as he shifted from ruling within the constitution set under the Rhee regime to establishing his formal authoritarian rule in 1972. This chapter focuses on the economic programs Park employed to aid his agenda while ignoring the concerns of the National Assembly. Chapter Two showcases the repressive structures that Park built his dictatorship on such as the Korean Central Intelligence Agency and the heavy military involvement in politics. This chapter discusses the formalization of the Yusin Constitution and Park's authoritarian measures to suppress student activist.

Part II is divided into three chapters and traces the emergence of the democracy movement from the context of the authoritarian political system. Chapter Three, in relation to this thesis' research on student movements, is the most important section of Chang's work. He explains how students made multiple attempts to organize a nationwide movement against the Park regime. This chapter provides an in-depth exploration the complex relationship between the Park regime, the military and the student activist. Park's assumption to power in 1961 meant that he understood the threat the students posed and worked deliberately to crush almost all dissent. Chapters Four and Five focus on the activism of the Church and the contributing role of journalist and lawyers to the larger democratic movement. These two topics are not discussed within the realm of this thesis but their role in supporting the democracy movement are important in South Korea history and the continuation of the movement.

Part III is divided into two chapters that focus on the adaptations dissidents use to evolve the democracy movement under the new repressive measures. In Chapter 6, Chang argues that the repressive measures by the Park regime unintentionally motivated the development of protest strategies and the movements ideology. While in Chapter 7, Chang explores the unintended consequences of systematic repression. In his concluding remarks, Chang discusses the impact of

the 1970s activism on the South Korea's democratization and the legacy built around it. Furthermore, he discusses how the 1970s brought several important pillars into the 1980s changing how democracy would interact with the Chun Doo Hwan regime and bring forth the end of authoritarianism in South Korea.

Paul Chang's work is vital to the discussion of South Korean student movements and the panoramic view that this thesis creates. *Protest Dialectics* bridges the issues of the 1960s and the 1980s through a clear view of the structures of power Park Chung Hee relied on while showcasing the commitment of the students in the face of state repression. As the "dark age" of South Korean democracy, the 1970s shape both the students and the regime that take up frame of the 1980s. Through this work this thesis is able to give a well-rounded picture of the evolution of South Korea and the students that helped bring it to democracy.

### **c. Literature on the 1980s...**

In the 1980s, the political transition from Park Chung Hee to Chun Doo Hwan was a fast moving force of military aggression. The assassination of Park Chung Hee by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency left a power vacuum open and hope for potential change in the hearts of the citizens. In this section of the literature review, the role of the students throughout the decade and documentation of the specific incident of the Kwangju uprising will be examined. These two works provide a detailed account of the student involvement with Wonmoo Dong's *University Students In South Korean Politics: Patterns of Radicalization in the 1980s* focusing on the patterns of radicalization in the university students in the 1980s and a reassessment of the events of the Kwangju Uprising by Shin Gi Wook and Hwang Kyung Moon in *Contentious Kwangju*.

The volume, *Contentious Kwangju*, is heralded as "the most thorough English-language treatment" of the Kwangju Uprising. The work is divided into two sections that offer, according

to the editors, a “balanced and comprehensive reassessment” of the event with the first section containing analytical retrospectives of the event while the second section contains scholarly exploration of the aftermath of the event. In the research for subsection C of the case study, Part I was the primary source of information regarding the events and horrors of the Kwangju Massacre and then the Uprising. In the introduction of the volume, Shin Gi Wook provides background to the political turmoil that sets up the Kwangju massacre and gives a detailed breakdown of the massacre itself. The informational priming in the introduction aides the readers through the highly personal accounts of the events they witnessed in the first section.

In the first retrospective, Choi Jung Woon discusses the formation of the “absolute community” within the city of Kwangju. He points that the creation of this absolute community, where there are no possession or social stratification, was the only way the citizens of Kwangju could fight against the paratroppers. It was in the masscre of students and anyone near in the firing line of the elite paratroppers that the meaning of protest was survival and not change. Choi in his concluding remarks syas that the citizens of Kwangju “risked their lives to recover their human dignity” as the elite paratroppers had slaughtered their neighbors and friends like dogs.

In the second retrospective, Ahn Jong Chul discusses the formation of the Citizens’ Army to protect and negotiate with the military. The Citizens’ Army at first was comprised of ordinary workers who were compelled to join after leaflets exaggerating the massacre’s death toll were distributed through out the city. The Army after initially taking back the city regoranzied to become student based with current and former college activist using their experience to lead the way forward. In the end, on May 27 of 1980, the Citizens’ Army ceased to exist after militay units infiltrated their headquarters. Ahn concludes that the Citizens’ Army “(un)fullied” their mission to expel the military as they were just ordinary people with one gaol.

The third retrospective is not referenced to in this research but holds a detailed day to day account of the events that transpired during the week of the Kwangju uprising. Jean Underwood reaccounts the notes from her husband John and fellow missionaries as they experienced the events unfolding around them. This section was not utilized due to the decision to maintain focus on one topic and the discussion of missionary involvement within Kwangju and South Korea would derail the topic of student-led protests. The work the missionaries did in saving lives though must be mentioned as they played an impactful role in supporting the Kwangju community during a horrifying time.

The last retrospective for Part I comes from Jung Keun Sik who questions “has Kwangju been realized?” This question seeks to know if the dignity of the citizens who died in the Uprising had been restored and if the goals and causes they died for had been fully realized. In the immediate aftermath of the Uprising, many citizens were branded as traitorous rioters by the Chun government and the information surrounding the events being warped to government desires. Jung in his retrospective notes that as a significant historical event Kwangju should be discussed according to three contexts: (1) local scene, (2) national circumstances, and (3) the international environment. He continues that the Kwangju democratization movement covers two distinct periods: the ten-day struggle of the Kwangju Uprising and the long term “May Movement” that organized to counter state terror and restore dignity to the victims. Jung concludes that despite the remaining challenges to democracy the “spirit of Kwangju” promises to guide Koreans in the new millennium.

Part II of *Contentious Kwangju* was not utilized due to the shift in direction of topic. The second part primarily focuses on the state impact on the citizens of Kwangju at the local level, most notably studying the trauma of the survivors. Still wanting to remain on topic about the

involvement of students in the events surround the Kwnagju Uprising, this section part would move the disucssion away from the topic of this thesis. Altogether, the volume provides a critical picutre of the events surround the Kwangju Uprising and the impact it holds on South Korea decades after the incident. This picture aides in showing the events and the impact of the Kwangju massacre rather than creating a one dimensional narrative that misses the emotional call to action that the “spirit of Kwnagju” ignited across South Korea.

Switching away from the singular incident of the Kwangju Uprising in 1980 to an account of the decade and the radicalization of university students, Wonmo Dong’s article examines the patterns of radicalization among South Korean university students in the 1980s. He focuses on the parts of student politics that were aimed at government institutions and at national level policies as this thesis does with its research. Within the paper, Dong examines the new trends of student activism in the 1980s and the concerns of changes in government policies towards student activist.

In his background on the relationship students held to government, Dong summarizes the nature of student clashes during the 1950s under Syngman Rhee then the changes in response during the Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan dictatorships. In a cycle of military confrontation, the Park and Chun regimes spent the previous twenty-five years (this article was published in 1987) relying all forms of suppression such a university closures and military occupation of campuses. These heavy-handed policies of the regimes did not deter the university students of the time, but only furthered their persistence for change. The Fifth Republic (1980-1987) saw a dramatic increase in student activism after the Kwangju Massacre and growing anti-American sentiments. The fall of 1982 saw a resurgence of student activism and correlated to the increase in university expulsions.

In a questionable move to control student activist, Chun implemented the campus autonomy policy that only furthered the student activist agenda. The return of formally expelled or imprisoned students saw dramatic shift in reorganization as students assembled an effective umbrella organization for cross campus coordination. “The Struggle Committee of the Liberation of the Masses, the Attainment of Democracy and Unification of the Nation” (Sanmintuwi) organized as the political arm of the “Nation Federation of Student Associations” (Chonhaknyon). After holding the United States Intelligence Service building hostage the government arrested sixty-three key leaders of the struggle committee and sent both groups into hiding after section 7 of the National Security Law stated that Sanmintu activist could be punished by death.

With the abolishment of Sanmintu, two new groups rose in its place the Chamintu (Committee for the Anti-U.S. Struggle for Independence and the Anti- Fascist Struggle for Democracy) and the Minmintu (Struggle Committee Against Imperialism, the Military, and Fascism and for the Nation and Democracy). Moving into 1986, these new groups and the work of consciousness- raising in factory workers, farmers and the urban poor saw incredible increase in radicalism across the country. According to a police report, 813 students were arrested and formally indicted during the spring semester of 1986. At the time this was written, by September 30th, 807 of these students were incarcerated in South Korean prisons.<sup>7</sup> In his concluding remarks, Wonmoo Dong states that growing radicalization of university students can best be explained as a reaction to Chun Doo Hwan’s seizure of power and the widening gap between rapid social change and rigid political structures.

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<sup>7</sup> Dong, Wonmoo; 253

The work by Wonmoo Dong plays an integral part in showcasing the reactionary relationship the students held to the government. The 1980s for the majority of Western civilization is not held with same tumultuous viewpoint that South Korea holds it in. Dong shows the statistics and events that made radicalization necessary and vital to progressing the democratic cause of South Korea. Due to its publication in 1987, the article does not account for the mass protest during the spring of 1987 but shows a lead up to the event that is critical to the watershed moment in South Korean history. The inclusion of this article in the 1980s subsection contextualizes an important decade of change for South Korea.

#### **d. Literature on the 2000s and 2010s...**

This thesis skips the 1990s in its chronological progression of events surrounding the protests that have taken place throughout South Korean history. The 1990s saw a decrease in the radical elements of student protests and a near 180 degree shift in the 2000s with the protest models used by students and citizens. In the early 2000s, the advent of universal internet and increases to connectivity formed a new protest model that facilitated faster and larger protests within South Korea. In her scholarly work, *Igniting the Internet: Youth Activism in Post-authoritarianism South Korea*, Jiyeon Kang states that through mass circulation of links and photos, internet-based activism was born through South Korean youths. She believes that the “captivation” that results from the sharing of incidents leads to public scrutiny. Through her work Kang seeks to answer two questions regarding the candlelight protests: What is the nature of these internet-based mass gatherings? And who are the young Koreans in the street? She argues that the new protest model demonstrated the strength of online communities that hold distinct communicative dynamics that do not conform to established political discourse. Kang’s

research is more centered on the internet aspect of the protests that have arisen out of the new millennium which overlaps with this thesis' focus on the protests itself.

Kang's work spans ten-years that primarily focuses on the inaugural protest of the candlelight model in 2002 and the maturation of the model through another wave of protests in 2008. She relies on three objects of inquiry to create a narrative surrounding the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the sociocultural context of the youth, online discourses surrounding various protests, and retrospective narratives from protest participants. Kang then divides her work into two parts, the first on the rise of internet-born youth activism focusing on the birth of the candlelight vigils in 2002 with the death of two girls and the election Roh Tae Woo as president. The second part focuses on the maturation of the protests in 2008 with the candlelight protests surrounding the decision to continue importing beef from the United States.

Kang's inclusion in this thesis is particularly important in tracking the transition from violent protest under authoritarianism and the peaceful, party-like atmosphere of the candlelight vigils that arose in 2002. While there is potential for Kang to over focus on the use of technology on the formation of this new protest model, she provides excellent accounts on the emotions and reason for involvement of students during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Her work also serves as a great primer for the impeachment of Park Geun Hye as the 2016 protests were the largest mass protest in South Korean history and definitively swayed government officials to impeach the president.

### **C. Theoretical Framework**

This thesis does not use a theoretical framework to analyze the events of the protests but does fit the model of social movement theory. This theory seeks explain why social mobilization occurs, how it can manifest, in addition to potential social, cultural, and political

consequences. Many of the social movement theories engage with protest formation from a western perspective mostly citing European examples of unrest in their work. For South Korea, the movement from Japanese imperialism to pseudo-democracy then authoritarianism created a specific environment for protests that are linked to nation itself. One cause of social movement formation is relative deprivation, the economic deprivation and along with unequal power distribution is a potential motivation for students and citizens to organize together against the government. Another factor is resource mobilization which plays specifically into the organization of the student-led movements as the social-organizational resource created social networks and complex organizational strategies that spread throughout universities in the country. Additionally, the cultural resource proved to be incredibly important as student activist in the 1970s were available and willing to train and lead new student activist in the 1980s. As social movements are still being studied and analyzed, potential work can arise in looking at the specific socio-political factors that manifest protests in Asia and in South Korea. Kim Quee Young's research acts a base for potential research on Eastern organization of social movements.

#### **IV. Methodology**

##### **A. Importance of the Case Study**

This thesis choose to focus specifically on student protests, college-educated, as their position in the political and social history of South Korea has severely impacted the journey to democracy. College educated students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century proven to be force around the world to demand change from their governments. Protesting has historically been an important method showing disagreement with the policies of the government or ruling party. Inspiration for this particular topic came from an anthropology study on resistance in Palestine and a discussion that

emphasized the role of educated students in the United States has had on the formation of protest like the March For Our Lives.

This case study takes a look at the decades after the end of the Korean War and the post democratic state of the Republic of South Korea. The 1960s focuses on the importance first large scale protest ended the regime of Syngman Rhee, first president of South Korea. The 1970s focuses on the push-pull nature the students developed with the military government under Park Chun Hee. The 1980s focuses the Kwangju Uprising during the Chun Doo Hwan regime and the uprisings effect on bridging different sectors of society to push democracy. The 2000s focuses on the effects of post 1993 presidential elections and how the generation of students in the 2010s created a new protest model seen in the 2016 protests to impeach former President Park Geun Hye.

## **B. Methods**

The method I used to view the topic of student led protest movements in South Korea was a historical approach. The case study for this is thesis is broken down by decade rather than presidency or authoritarian versus democracy to focus on the generational differences of each protest movement. For every ten years, there was a new class of college students learning from past protests and evolving into their own method for that decade. Using a historical approach, the narrative of the protest movements could be compared against each from an objective standpoint that focuses solely on the students involvement in furthering democratic values. I look to answer the question of how student led protests impacted democracy by stating there was an evolution that took place moving from the first mass student protest of April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1960. To answer this, I am primarily used social journals regarding protests and social movements and research in scholarly books conducted on specific decades.

In my decision to organize this case study, I choose to focus on national politics rather than regional politics to allow for consistent area of study. To study the regional politics in relation to student based protests would require a significant increase in language abilities, resources, and time. Regional politics in South Korea varies from region to region as the economic effects of moving from agricultural to industry differed in each area. The study of national politics shows a singular incident that could force the nation to protest around it such as authoritarian regimes or presidential corruption. Particular to only this thesis is the length of the literature review, taking a historical approach the literature review seeks to appropriately prime the readers regarding the sources and the events discussed within them that appear in the case study. Many of the sources cited in the literature take an in-depth analysis of their specific topic providing an additional expertise that due to constraints cannot be expanded upon in this research. The literature review is broken down by decade and features a detailed overview of the sources I deemed most important to the overall understanding of the evolution of the South Korean student protests.

### **C. Limitations**

The limitations of this thesis are first and foremost the language barrier in regards to finding accounts of the protests. Covering of protests other than the 1980s in the English-language is fairly limited but the sources found have been comprehensive in their works. Additionally, the South Korean government during the 1980s made a point to misrepresent and warp the accounts of the protesters and the prevent victims of state violence from speaking out. The Kwangju Uprising experienced the effect of the government coverup and then creation of a false narratives that overlooked the victims of the violence. These repressive actions also made it difficult to find texts in the English language. Another limitation is research on other theories students were using to foster there ideology that were not the focus of the thesis but deserve

mention. The primary theory that showed up in my research was liberation theology and ties heavily to the religious groups involvement in democratic reforms. Another limitation was the specifics of the curriculum the students received. The curriculum of the 1960s seemed to focus on Western philosophy and Confucianism. The later decades do not discuss the curriculum but discuss the outside readings, primarily Marxist, that students read during the 1980s. The last limitation is the length of the paper as it is hard to truly be exhaustive on a time of this length and scope. Limiting the paper to only student protests and their effects on democracy narrows the overall scope of the paper to meet the requirements but does limit the depth of the subtopics. Overall the limitations, do not hinder the quality of this thesis research and still hopes to provide an in-depth analysis of South Korean protests led by college students.

## **V. Case Study**

### **A. Student Movements of the 1960s: Fall of Syngman Rhee and the Rise of the Protest Model**

The student-led protests movements in South Korea are rooted in a deep history that creates national and local identity. The first mass student protest in the 1960s is held in contending viewpoints by scholars, either that it created political unrest, or it championed democratic goals. This thesis takes the claim that the April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1960, protest incited both political unrest and demands of democratic goals as it is the first spoke in the evolutionary wheel of student protests in South Korea. To understand the evolution of these protests, we must first understand the conditions that created them. The division of the Korean Peninsula along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel propelled South Korea into a long line of military dictatorships and corrupt politicians vying for power starting with first President Syngman Rhee. Rhee's presidency was backed by

the United States to maintain control of the southern region during the Korean War (1950-1953). He was appointed the head of government in 1945, and then elected president in the first presidential election in 1948.<sup>8</sup> The ten years between Rhee's election to presidency and re-election in 1960 were plagued by an "eerie silence" as South Korean intellectual's watched the injustices committed by the Rhee regime every day of their lives.<sup>9</sup>

South Korean's had lost faith in the future of their country during the 1950s, having lived through unemployment, poverty, and political violence as a result of Rhee's dictatorship while also suffering from the mental trauma of the Korean War.<sup>10</sup> While citizens moved to focus on their private lives instead of politics, the National Assembly still attempted to mitigate Rhee's political moves. In 1954, Rhee amended the constitution to run for the presidency after his second term, which was quickly coming to an end. The 1956 and 1958 elections saw Rhee's numbers declining rapidly as the opposition parties began to pick up votes and support.<sup>11</sup> As the Rhee regime moved to censor the media regarding their losses and pull through with a victory in the 1960 election, the changing demographics would mark the beginning of the post-liberation social movements.

The evolution of student movements began with the growth in size of universities in South Korea. The rise in the number of college-educated youths in the country is key to understanding the radically shifting political landscape that arose in the 1960s. In 1945, there were 28 universities in the country, a number that rose to 85 in 1960 with an enrollment rate increasing from 4 percent to 12 percent.<sup>12</sup> The education university students received during this

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<sup>8</sup> Association of Democratic Studies and Training

<sup>9</sup> Kim, Dong Choon, 622

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 622

<sup>11</sup> Kim, Quee Young, 1186

<sup>12</sup> Kim, Quee Young, 1186

era focused on general knowledge with national service as the goal after graduation and national issues as the center of conversations. This incubator of political thought saw that “the larger the university population grew, the stronger became the students' concern and interest regarding national politics.”<sup>13</sup> Rhee’s government could not prepare for this dramatic shift in social consciousness as students rather than the political elite became the force for democratic change.

Democratic change came from students rather than elected officials due to the corruption of the ruling party and political elites siding with Rhee. Rhee’s corrupt ruling party, The Liberal Party prepared to win the election at all cost, mobilizing every branch of government to re-elect Rhee and fabricate election results. The actions of the ruling government and the elite contrasted the education that the university students had been taught to value and envision. According to theory on authoritarianism, the Rhee regime used their resources to suppress and enact political terror on society. They arrested opposition party workers, denied them entrance to selected areas, and “patriotic” gangs lynched some opposition members.<sup>14</sup> In the eyes of many students, South Korea failed dramatically at being a representative democracy and did not match up to the models of Western democracy. The exposure of the scheme and the results of the election (Rhee won with 74 percent of votes) galvanized the public into protesting against the fraud.

The corruption and rampant fraud brought college educated students to an important realization regarding their government. The rigging of the election was a violation of fair democracy as the authorities violated the principles that the students had been taught in school resulting in a “disjunctive justice.”<sup>15</sup> The subsequent protests exposed the specific advantage the students held in society. Through of the political theory about the origins of protests, the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1186

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 1187

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 1187

resources students were privy to offered them greater accessibility to public dissent while those truly disenfranchised had no means of organization. The students had institutional resources, flexible time, and the moral authority to represent the authentic voice of South Korea, and their privileged status as students protected them from harsh punishment by the authorities for their actions.<sup>16</sup> This initial protest would become the first spoke in the wheel as subsequent protests until the 1980s were modeled after the 4-19 revolt.

Before the 4-19 revolt existed as a day of democratic liberation, the nation went through months of unrest as the Rhee regime used state violence and voter suppression to control the populace. From February 28th to April 19<sup>th</sup>, South Korea experienced a wave of protests across the southern region. Students from several high schools in Taegu (Daegu) marched in the streets against an order by the government to attend school on a Saturday. On Election Day, March 15<sup>th</sup>, the city of Masan saw angry voters march on the city hall demanding to know why they had been removed from the voter registration. Secretly, the Masan police were indiscriminately torturing arrested citizens, and then discarding their dead bodies into the sea; written off as a communist plot to cover their crimes. On April 11<sup>th</sup>, a body was discovered in the bay with a police tear gas canister lodged in its eye socket.<sup>17</sup> Multiple fact-finding committees descended on Masan to investigate, and the results sparked a wave of unrest. One witness recalled, “Almost every living soul in Masan seemed to have risen to violent hysteria.”<sup>18</sup> Several government buildings were burned and hundreds wounded in the outpouring of anger. These local uprising in south functioned as a national signal that change was needed and the students were willing to provide it.

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<sup>16</sup> Kim, Quee Young, 1188

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1189

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1189

In Seoul, 3,000 students, organized by student leaders at Korea University, led a march on the National Assembly building demanding a new, fair election. They were not answered with signs of political reform from politicians but instead attacked by the Anti-Communist Youth League. On April 19th, remembered as 4-19 or the 4-19 Revolt, 50,000 students fought their way pass police lines to protest in front of various government buildings stunning and overwhelming government officials by the mass protest.<sup>19</sup> April 19<sup>th</sup> is widely regarded as the turning point of the protests as the second wave of protests called for the resignation of Syngman Rhee and his ultimate leave from power on April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1960.

The 4-19 protest showed for the first time the strength of the student population in South Korea and what collective action could achieve. The most important aspect of the 4-19 protest is that the adult generation of South Koreans could not predict that the students would play the role of the “vanguard in the democratization movements.”<sup>20</sup> The 4-19 protest marks the line between generational consciousness in South Koreans, as in the 1960s the students were the most educated force in the country and unburdened by the traumas their parents and grandparents had suffered from the Korean War. 4-19, from a theoretical point of view, is not a revolution but is an important change in collective action. The students did not claim to be government, but rather revolutionized how collective action could be used to change “the rules, procedures, norms, and principles of [a] regime.”<sup>21</sup> As mentioned at the beginning of the case study, the 4-19 movement is held in opposing viewpoints in regards to its creation of political turmoil and promotion of democratic goals. Despite both these views, the 4-19 Revolt is considered the benchmark for the

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<sup>19</sup> Kim, Quee Young, 1189

<sup>20</sup> Kim, Dong Choon, 623

<sup>21</sup> Kim, Quee Young, 1190

Korean democratic struggle as the next wave of Korean youth attempt to organize against Rhee's successor Park Chung Hee and his military dictatorship.

## **B. Student Movements in the 1970s: Clashes against the Military State and the Demise of the Student Movement**

The next evolutionary moment of student-led protests came in the 1970s with the beginning of the military state. The military dictatorship of Park Chung Hee began in May 1961 with a coup d'état of the South Korean government. Kim Dong Choon posits that the military takeover was imminent and inevitable as South Korea has the largest civilian to military ratio and the Korean War required vast numbers of conscripted soldiers to defend the nation.<sup>22</sup> Kim continues that the military versus student clash resulted out of their commonalities rather than their differences. The military gave disciplined training and basic literacy to the Korean young men believing that they were the "pioneers of national destiny" much like the student population of South Korea. These commonalities made the differences twice as divisive as Park Chung Hee moved from "soft authoritarianism" to formal authoritarianism with a constitutional change.<sup>23</sup> Both the college students and the military could not be the driving force of the state, Park Chung Hee from the outset made sure the military won this battle of wills.

Trained by the Japanese military before 1945, two-star Major General Park Chung Hee successfully executed a coup d'état that would begin to implement an authoritarian rule on the country. The removal of Syngman Rhee opened an enormous vacuum of power and the continuing protests accelerated the political instability in the country. Initially, many students

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<sup>22</sup> Kim Dong Choon, 624

<sup>23</sup> Chang, Paul, 15

and the United States government accepted the new Park administration with a “wait and see” attitude as it brought order and stability to the brewing social chaos, political demonstrations, hyperinflation, and spiking crime rates. Park claimed that his regime was a transitional period back to democratic rule, only at the behest of the Korean people and the American government did he retire as general and subsequently run for president in 1963.<sup>24</sup> At his inaugural address on December 17, 1963, President Park declared that the May coup d’état was a continuation of the 4-19 movement, “our unavoidable historical task in this decade, as initiated in the course of the April and May Revolutions, is the modernization of the fatherland in all fields—political, economic, social and culture.”<sup>25</sup> It is important to note, as the difference in viewpoints creates tension between the students and the military, that the students of 4-19 movement did not believe the two groups could co-exist as the military did not hold the values they believed was necessary for a democratic state. Park’s May revolution was a government takeover rather than a demand for democratic values and this difference plays heavily into the tactics that Park takes against the student movements.

The first signs of transitioning authoritarianism came during the Vietnam War, as Park dispatched soldiers to support American interests and involvement in exchange for a multi-billion military aid deal. Using his majority seat power in the National Assembly, the dispatch bill passed but became evidence of Park’s “complete disregard for minority party members and his unwillingness to engage in dialogue and debate” in the face of opposition to his policies. The next bill, to rebuild diplomatic relations with Japan, produced widespread dissent, as many believed they were conceding to a “humiliating agreement” as Japan agreed to pay “\$800 million

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>25</sup> Chang, Paul, 17

in grants and preferential loans as reparations for Japanese colonial wrongdoings.”<sup>26</sup> Various segments of Korean society believed Park Chung Hee was selling out the country to fund his economic programs. This bill sparked the first wave of protests during the Park Chung Hee regime; March 1964 saw the largest protests since the 4-19 movement with students organizing a nationwide protest. Park did not react kindly to the sweeping student protests; he declared martial law on June 3, 1964, and deploying military personnel to put down the student protests violently. This over use of military power would become a standard of the Park regime during his move to formal authoritarianism.

Completing his first term with two passed bills to bring in U.S. and Japanese capital and successfully quelled protests, Park began to make moves to prolong his presidency past the constitutional two terms. After his election to the presidency in 1967, Park organized and bypassed the minority members of the National Assembly to amend the constitution to allow for three terms. Students again protested the manipulation of democratic values. The Fall of 1969 saw multiple violent face-offs between police and students. Despite the repressive tactics, Park Chung Hee justified his actions as necessary to continue economic development. He also insisted that if he was democratically elected for a third term, it would be his last. Paul Chang citing Hyung Baeg Im shows that Park had crafted roads to an indefinite presidency through systematic removal of members of his ruling party that may desire to succeed him.<sup>27</sup> Upon his defeat of Kim Dae Jung and successful election to a third term, Park declared martial law on December 17, 1972, and marked the beginning of the Yusin Regime (1972-1979). The Yusin constitution gave a formal structure to Park’s authoritarian regime and branches to implement repressive structural violence.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>27</sup> Chang, Paul 21

The Yusin regime gave Park Chung Hee enough latitude to thoroughly dismantle student protests and leadership from the inside out. In 1971, Park declared that male students must enroll in garrison training or be conscripted to the military. This decree allowed Park to enter universities arresting students affiliated with democratic movements and undermining the leadership of many democratic organizations such as the Student Alliance, who was responsible for the organization of mass student demonstrations in the spring and summer of 1971.<sup>28</sup> By December 6, Park had declared the country in a state of national emergency solidifying the systematic repression of the student movement. This moment would be the first fall of the student movement as the Yusin regime destroyed its leadership and organization.

It took two years for student movements to start to organize after the Park regimes crackdown of student activists. With a new class of students in leadership, the student movement was once again ready to mobilize, but not without fear of military repression. The realization of the Yusin regime's policies gave students a reason to organize and form a national front like many protests before them.<sup>29</sup> Reorganization came in the form of the "3-3-3" system relying on three core departments at Seoul National University and expanding outwards to the greater Seoul metropolitan area then further across the whole nation. With this national network, the new leadership could coordinate on scale through established communications channels and began to make moves for a nationwide protest.<sup>30</sup> By February 1974, the communications network was established, and in March of the same year, core student leaders held several meetings to decide the date for the mass demonstrations across the country. These protests would be modeled off protests on April 15, 1971, where more than twenty thousand students demonstrated against the

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 67

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 68

<sup>30</sup> Chang, Paul, 69

Park Chung Hee regime in a nationally coordinated event.<sup>31</sup> In fear of information leaks, the date of the protests was changed repeatedly from March 11. The student leaders refrained from officially naming their national network until dates were formalized hoping to maintain the secrecy of their upcoming mass protest.

Now officially titled the National Democratic Youth and Student Alliance (*Chonguk Minju Chongnyon Haksaeng Chongyonmaeng*; abbreviated Minchong), the students selected April 3, 1974, as the day of the protests.<sup>32</sup> Paul Chang states that these protests were the earliest articulations of the “three *min* ideology” (*sammin inyom*), as students at several locations “jointly proclaimed the Declaration of People, Nation, and Democracy (Minjung minjok minju sonon).”<sup>33</sup> This ideology becomes the master framework of the 1980s democracy movement as the public and students began to reorganize along the lines of national identity. In the evolution of student protest, this ideology is formative in how the wheel of student activism turns for the students and against the state.

Before the success of the 1980s, the Park regime made another thorough attempt to end student activism in South Korea. As the students kept evolving in tactics so did the military with evolutionary wheel now including the effects of military repression. Despite all the work the students had put in for months, Park Chung Hee was prepared and acted through swift state repression. The National Democratic Youth and Student Alliance (NDYSA) was identified as “the master organization behind the growing number of student protests” in his Emergency Decree (ED) 4.<sup>34</sup> ED 4 went into effect at 10:00 pm on April 3, making the specific tactics students used in their

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 70

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 70

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 70

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 71

anti-Park movement illegal. Of the ED's articles, these three articles directly identifies the NYDSA and those suspected to be affiliated with the organization:

Article 1: Creating or becoming a member of any organization related to the Chŏn'guk Minju Ch'ŏngnyŏn Haksaeng Ch'ongyŏnmaeng (hereafter "organization"), encouraging the activities of the members of the organization, providing resources to aid members who are in hiding, holding meetings, and corresponding, and any direct or indirect participation in the activities of the organization are all banned.

Article 2: Publishing, creating, possessing, distributing, exhibiting, and selling any texts, documents, books, music albums, and other materials related to the activities of the organization and its members are all banned.

Article 5: Students' refusal to attend classes and take exams without a just cause; gatherings, demonstrations, rallies, sit-ins, and engaging in any individual or organized activities in and around school outside of normal class; and research activities not supervised by school employees are all banned, with the exception of official apolitical activities.<sup>35</sup>

Emergency Decree 4 ensured that all aspects of student activism was a criminal offense and forced both students and professors assisting them to stop their efforts. Article 1 specifically stops the action of meeting or attempting to organize. As most student activists used university centers to conduct their meetings or plan future events, Article 1 forced students into underground organizations. Article 5 made attendance mandatory by the government and public demonstrations on any scale a criminal offense. In article 8 of ED 4, students found in violation of the articles and anyone critical of the decree was threatened with "death, life imprisonment, or a minimum of 5 years imprisonment."<sup>36</sup> Within a month of ED 4's institution, 1,024 students were taken into custody by the Park government; 253 of these students were tried in the Emergency Martial Court,

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<sup>35</sup> Chang, Paul, 71

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 72

and 180 of this group of students were convicted and sentenced.<sup>37</sup> Park Chung Hee had effectively used the military to suppress student activism in all forms.

From this moment onwards, the mass arrests of the students would be referred to as the “Minchong incident,” and the Yusin regime would expand their search for those related to the NYDSA. Park Chung Hee’s strategic use of ED 4 appears in the report by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA) where the framework for communist identification was used to describe the student movement.<sup>38</sup> To squelch and prevent further demonstrations, Park gave the movement an identity that could be manipulated and claimed that democracy was not the goal of the students but rather a “communist revolution.” The use of this mislabeling prevented many citizens from sympathizing with the goals of students in the years remaining under Park Chun Hee.

In the face of this extreme state repression, the student movement of the 1970s collapsed. But in its place came the religious fervor of Korean Christians and the lawyers and journalist who had witnessed the atrocities against the youth. Just as the students were able to learn from past mistakes of the early 1971 protest and the 4-19 movement, Park Chung Hee had learned how to counter the student force in ways the Rhee regime could not. The friction from the state and student movements clashes are seen at its fullest during the Yusin regime. The impact students’ held against the state pushed them to use require wrongful imprisonment, martial law, and other repressive actions to suppress student activism. While the students were crushed, their spirit and dedication motivated other sectors of Korean society to form new social movements for the remainder of the Park Chung Hee’s regime. On October 26, 1979, Park Chung Hee was murdered by the KCIA, leaving Choi Kyu Ha as acting President and the country open for

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<sup>37</sup> Yi in Chang, Paul, 72

<sup>38</sup> Chang, Paul, 73

another coup d'état. The 1980s would prove to be a defining moment in the Korean people's struggle for democracy.

### **C. Student Movements in the 1980s: Creation of a Collective Identity and the Demand for Democracy**

The 1980s student movements in South Korea flipped the switch from student only demonstrations to demonstrations that were fueled by a national consciousness. Through this switch the populace gained a sense that they were all Korean people and desired the same rights building a "collective identity." This concept speaks to the belief that the shared history of the Korean people ties them together and supersedes the issues of class and wealth. Until the 1980s, demands for democracy came primarily from college-educated students but the second coup bridged the gaps between the working class and students. The Park regimes use of state violence and the intensely repressive state under Chun Doo Hwan motivated many sectors of society to demand democracy. As the waning years of the 1970s showed, President Park Chung Hee's military force decimated the student movement. The quelled student protests did not solve all of the problems facing Park Chung Hee. In the last year of his presidency, all sides of his regime began to unravel in front of him with divisions within the ruling party and growing public discontent.

The growing public discontent motivated students to organize again to protest Park Chung Hee's regime. The first instance of the revival of the student protest was the ousting of opposition party leader, Kim Young Sam, from the National Assembly under the "Purification Campaign."<sup>39</sup> As a native of that Pusan (Busan) and Masan region, Kim's removal from the

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<sup>39</sup> Shin and Hwang 2003, xiii

National Assembly sparked enough anger at the disregard for rule of law and Park Chung Hee's continued abuse of power for students at Pusan National University to start protesting. On October 16, 1979, several months before the Kwangju Uprising, several hundred students demonstrated on campus and fought riot police throughout the city.

By late October, the Park regime was in a severe downturn with no signs of recovery. On October 26, 1979, chief of the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (founded by Park Chung Hee), Kim Chae Gyu assassinated Park Chung Hee leaving Choi Kyu Ha as president of the fragile government. On December 2, 1979, the "new military" headed by Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo seized control through a military coup.<sup>40</sup> The Chun-Roh coup only flamed the frustrations and anger of the Korean population who hoped the end of the Yusin regime would lead to a democratic reform. The coup acted as another fork in the road as many Koreans felt betrayed at the prospect of a future in another military dictatorship. By this time in South Korean political history, the students were highly politicalized and active in national politics despite the increasing presence of riot police and other draconian policies as seen with previous two sections.<sup>41</sup> In the spring of 1980, most college campuses were actively holding protests and demonstrations demanding Chun's resignation from government and immediate presidential elections.

The surge in student protests, only three days before Kwangju, brought an estimated 150,000 students and citizens to Seoul station demanding political reform. At this point, the phrase "collective identity" was not used but multiple sectors of society protesting together showed a cross-cutting of identities to eventually become one. On May 17, Seoul college campuses were quiet in hopes that the Chun regime would answer their demands but instead

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, xiv

<sup>41</sup> Dong 1987, 235

were met with a nationwide declaration of martial law, suspending the cabinet and closing the National Assembly. For many college-educated students across Seoul, they had been rigorously fighting against corrupt regimes in the name of democracy. Under martial law, Chun Doo Hwan and the military exercised complete control over the republic, closing university campuses across the country and arresting political leaders.<sup>42</sup> The suspension of classes and the breakdown of rule of law left many students, already politically active, with little reason not to protest.

The closure of college campuses became the backdrop for students of Kwangju; unable to attend classes they remained on the streets to protest the illegal actions of the Chun Doo Hwan regime. University students in the 1980 were “more openly radical, exhibiting a rising militancy and sophistication in their tactics and ideological orientations” with the nature of student activism dramatically changed.<sup>43</sup> Jung Woon Choi, in *Contentious Kwangju*, points that student demonstrations were common occurrences in large cities over the previous months and years, as the early sections have detailed, with citizens holding diverse options regarding their actions.<sup>44</sup> These opinions ranged from support of the students’ desire for democratic rule, neutral, or believed that they simply did not want to study. Around noon on May 18<sup>th</sup> of 1980 saw textbook use of riot police to suppress student demonstrators, but in only a few hours the deployment of elite paratrooper units to the center of downtown Kwangju changed the course history.

For many that witnessed the incident firsthand, they were unprepared to process the events or even relay the brutality they witnessed to others in the aftermath. Reporter Kim Chung Gun of the *Dong-A Ilbo* recounts his inability to articulate his feelings much less the events he witnessed on that day: “barbarity, aggression, indiscriminate attack – expressions of the type

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<sup>42</sup> Shin and Kwang 2003, xiv

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 235

<sup>44</sup> Choi in Shin and Kwang, 3

were utterly inadequate, too smooth around the edges. At my wit's end, the expression that occurred to me was "human hunting."<sup>45</sup> Unlike all previous student demonstrations, this student demonstration was met with an excessive use of force. Innocent civilians, young women, old men, and students, were indiscriminately slaughtered by the elite paratrooper units. For the city of Kwangju, the violence changed the reason for protesting, and ultimately fighting, from democratic reform to survival. The extreme brutality used against the students of Chonnam University spurred the witnesses into joining the protests in the days to follow.

Kwangju became the third spoke in the wheel of student protests, the evolution now moved to include more sectors of society. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, democratic reform was the main goal for student-led demonstrations while the rest of the civilian population largely watched from the sidelines. The 1980s bridges these two factions in ways the student movements of previous years were unable to do, joining student activists with the working class sector. The Kwangju Uprising saw a unification of the city under common desire and survival, that cross-cut multiple socioeconomic statuses. Understanding the precedent that the Kwangju Uprising held in uniting the students and the larger Korean society provides clarity to why the 1987 protests were able to achieve an almost forty-year goal of democracy in South Korea. This section will take steps to unpack the movement from protest to revolt and the students' position in this transition.

The timeline of the Kwangju Uprising only lasted a week, but created a change in how the national populace interacted with the demands for democracy. On May 19<sup>th</sup> and May 20<sup>th</sup> of 1980, citizens of Kwangju engaged in individual fights with authorities in hopes of survival and encouragement to other citizens. By the afternoon of May 20<sup>th</sup>, the citizens of Kwangju had formed an absolute community, "citizens who autonomously overcame their fears, risked their

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<sup>45</sup> Choi in Shin and Kwang, 4

lives in the struggle, and came together freely to reaffirm and celebrate their humanity, their true citizenship.”<sup>46</sup> This affirmation of collectivity gave the city a sense of dignity that they had lost during slaughter days before. On May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1980, another change resulted out of excessive military force. Martial law troops opened fire on crowds shooting to kill forcing citizens to take up arms becoming the “Citizen’s Army.”

At night, the Student Revolution Committee and Committee of Citizens For Democratic Struggle distributed leaflets across the city that greatly exaggerated the casualties but informed and galvanized those unaware of the shooting to join the Citizen’s Army.<sup>47</sup> The spontaneous armed uprising regrouped to form an organized resistance to prepare for diplomatic negotiations with the military in the days to come. With the retreat of the martial law troops, two committees of leadership were formed, the Civic Settlement Committee and Student Settlement Committee to negotiate with the government to end the massacre. The formation of the new leadership allowed the people of Kwangju to act as revolutionary bodies, not claiming to be a new government but taking up space as equals to make demands.

Organized now as a resistance movement rather than spontaneous uprising, activist leaders in hiding decided it was their duty to offer guidance to blue-collar workers. They stressed that their experience and education was necessary to lead the movement. Now the Kwangju People’s Struggle Leadership, the movement’s leadership was diverse in the sectors it represented with the army breaking down into three sections: the core student group, action corps members, and people from various classes.<sup>48</sup> The core student group consisted of student activists and leaders of student organizations at universities in the city as they played a pivotal

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 6

<sup>47</sup> Ahn in Shin and Kwang, 17

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 19

role in planning and carrying out rallies.<sup>49</sup> But the bulk of front lines were made of factory and blue-collar workers, usually seventeen- and eighteen-year-old boys. This distinction explains why the autopsy reports saw mostly workers among the dead rather than students. On May 27<sup>th</sup> of 1980, the Citizen's Army ceased to exist as the martial law troops and elite paratroopers stormed the strongholds of the Struggle Leadership effectively wiping out the counterforce of the Kwangju Uprising. The difference in skill and military weaponry were insurmountable, as the absolute community and Citizen's Army's solidarity and desire could not bring victory.

Did the quelling of the Kwangju Uprising squelch subsequent protests in South Korea? No; in fact, the impact of Kwangju created a greater desire for democratic reform across the nation. The Chun government labeled citizens as rioters: the military suppression justified as the people of Kwangju were an unlawful mob. But from this defeat came an awakening of collective efforts to commemorate the Kwangju uprising, the May movement. In Chapter 4 of *Contentious Kwangju*, Keun Sik Jung states, "the democratization movement in Korea entered a new era after the Kwangju uprising."<sup>50</sup> The first change was the expansion of the movement's base from students to more sectors of society, allowing for the formation of a youth movement and participation from the older generation. The second change saw the student movement move from a few elite colleges to most colleges and universities in the country. The third and fourth reasons saw class-consciousness rise as farmers and workers were mobilized. The fifth movement heralds back to the 1970s protest of the "three *min* ideology," with social movements in organizing around the conceptions of *minjok* (nation), *minju* (democracy), and *minjung* (masses).<sup>51</sup> It is with this transformation across socioeconomic statuses that the weight of the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>50</sup> Jung in Shin and Kwang, 45

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 45

fight for democracy was not only on college-educated youth but on the nation demanding rights and accountability from its government. In the face of the Chun regime's oppressive tactics, the clear goal for student organizations and national movements to follow would be a revolution.

As student activists and the working class sector moved to unify, the Chun regime took steps to solidify their power and maintain absolute control. Chun Doo Hwan's "Purification Campaign," saw 8,000 government officials dismissed and 840 politicians removed from engaging in national and local politics and 583 students expelled.<sup>52</sup> The Chun regime moved as far as surveillance and other control measures to stymie the tide of student activism. While transitioning to underground organizations under overt pressures, many campuses saw an undercurrent of neo-Marxist and anti-American ideology wash over them. The college students of the 1980s lived through and were educated by the repressive Yusin regime as middle and high schoolers. Their experiences defined by mass suppression of pop culture under a censored public and private lifestyle. The rise of Marxist ideology in the 1980s hold ties to conflicting teachings the educated youth of South Korea experienced and the desire to the vanguards of the "conscience of society."<sup>53</sup>

As vanguards of consciousness, the "consciousness movement" took root in many universities as an intellectual counter culture came to dominate the 1980s. The counter intellectual culture saw a gain in Marxist and Leninist readings and development of research groups surrounding prominent Korean thinkers. The growth in the realm of political thinking forced students to reflect and think critically about their previous political experience and why past movements failed to enact change.<sup>54</sup> Many scholars found that the past movements were

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<sup>52</sup> Dong 1987, 237

<sup>53</sup> Park 2005, 267

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 271

limited, narrowly focused on individual human rights and demanded limited political reforms with no vision for an alternative society. This new focus on how to integrate and successfully create a revolution created another spoke in the wheel as the nation moved closer to independence. As Quee Young Kim discussed regarding the 1960s, the student movements did not aim to be a new government or change the structures in which the government operated. Also, there was a lack of cooperation between the students and the working class and lack of revolutionary leadership. These reflections and critical analysis called for new structuring and new lenses of the South Korean government.<sup>55</sup>

One of the new lenses the students viewed the Chun regime through was their connection and reliance on the United States government and military. A large portion of anti-American sentiment arose from U.S. backing of dictatorial regimes and the Kwangju massacre, as the deployment of Korean troops requires U.S. approval first. The Kwangju massacres relation to the U.S. fueled the students claim that the “United States [was] the main obstacle for Korean reunification and democratization, since the United States has consistently supported military dictatorships.”<sup>56</sup> This two-fold factor drove the Chun regime to crackdown on “domestic dissidents” arresting students and religious leaders. The results of Chun’s crackdown saw 73% of political prisoners listed as students in 1982 and a spike in school expulsions from 198 in 1982 to 327 in 1983 (Figure 1).<sup>57</sup> In the fall of 1982, the resurgence of student activism pushed for a drastic measure in student repression. The Chun regime enacted mandatory conscription with the Korean Ministry of Education reporting 465 (male) students between May 17, 1980, to the end of 1983 entering the military.

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<sup>55</sup> Park 2005, 271

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 272

<sup>57</sup> Figure 1 of the Appendix

With many leaders either imprisoned or under military service the underground student movements fractioned into different forms of communist thought: Marxism, North Korean Jucheism, and Leninism. Now primarily active underground, the overt political actions the students engaged in were limited to small on-campus demonstrations and anti-government leaflet distribution. By 1984, Chun Doo Hwan faced a deepening communist ideology amongst students and anti-government activity. In an attempt to slow the momentum of these sentiments, Chun introduced the “Campus Autonomy Policy” in the spring semester of 1984.<sup>58</sup> The policy allowed the readmission of “350 student activist released from prisons, 1,363 expelled students and about eighty professors who had been dismissed from their teaching positions.”<sup>59</sup> The policy also called for the removal of police detectives and informers along with the announcement by the Ministry of Education that university administrations would have complete power to deal with all school affairs.

Wonmoo Dong points that there are several plausible explanations for Chun’s step back from austere tactics. The first being that the Chun regime recognized “the futility and counterproductive effects of police-state tactics” as new underground movements moved to be communist in ideology and previously only served to heighten student unrest. The second reason believed to be that “realistic opposing views” would be the best way to counter growing neo-Marxist ideology within Korean youth. The third reason believed that the policy was largely experimental and could be rescinded at any time. A key aspect of the third reason was the idea that during its institution the policy could identify campus instigators and justify further

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<sup>58</sup> Dong 1987, 241

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 241

repressive tactics.<sup>60</sup> Altogether the policy seemed to return order to universities while bringing forth chaos for Chun regime.

Despite the plausible reasons for the policy, the effects were disastrous from the standpoint of corralling student activism in Korean universities. The reintroduction of formerly expelled and imprisoned students saw a takeover of student governments across the country by the spring of 1985. On April 17, 1985, sixty-two universities and colleges formed together to create the National Federation of Student Associations.<sup>61</sup> Chun Doo Hwan's attempt at controlling the college educated population of South Korea crumbled into a strengthened and unified regional and national network of student organizations.

After being shut down for years, student activist again worked towards concrete political change just like the predecessors spent the past forty years through demonstrations and protests. The force of the renewed "exuberance and confidence" in student activist could be seen in their volunteer efforts for the February 1985 National Assembly election. For an important election, the force of college students was significant in demonstrating how "unpopular and fragile" the ruling Democratic Justice Party and Chun Doo Hwan's regime was in South Korea. In addition, this election showed that the 20-29 age demographic constituted fifty-eight percent of total voters<sup>62</sup> rocketing them to the most important voter demographic in the country. For university students, they proved that not only could they not be ignored but they could also "directly influence the outcome of the electoral process in Korean politics."<sup>63</sup> The college-educated youths saw direct results in their continued efforts for democracy while showing to the rest of the country their commitment towards democratic reforms.

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<sup>60</sup> Dong 1987, 241

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 242

<sup>62</sup> Dong, Wonmoo, 1987; 242

<sup>63</sup> Ibid; 242

Riding on the waves of the National Assembly election, the collapse of Ferdinand Marcos' authoritarian dictatorship in the Philippines provided "a powerful impetus to the activation of opposition politics" and revitalized student radicalism. The opposition party, New Korea Democratic Party, initiated a nationwide petition campaign that called for a constitutional revision that allowed for direct election of the president.<sup>64</sup> The petition obtained ten million signatures, around roughly one-half of the electorate<sup>65</sup>, due to the continued organization and mobilization capabilities of student activists. With widespread support from the country and international allies, the constitutional revision campaign was successfully brought to fruition in March and April 1986.

1986 continued to move forward with political fervor and intense radicalism as college activists had graduated and entered into the industrial workforce to further their political agendas. The increase of in labor-student relations demonstrated the degree to which the underground student organizations had penetrated the labor movements. In this new formation, former college students concealed their education level to gain employment as blue collar workers, a move that was illegal and highly secretive. These students were called *hakchul nodongja* and there was an estimated 10,000 *hakchul* workers by the late 1980s.<sup>66</sup> For the remainder of the 1986 and into 1987, the country would swell under the weight of unrest by students and labor movements.

This unrest was felt most strongly by President Chun Doo Hwan as his seven-year presidency was coming to an end in February of 1988. The death of Park Jong Cheol, tortured by the government officials in January of 1987, threw the country into further unrest as the anti-

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid; 248

<sup>65</sup> Ibid; 248

<sup>66</sup> Park, Mi; 276

government movements were given a rally point. The event further strengthened the position of opposition parties who saw the ruling party as weak and vulnerable.<sup>67</sup> Another student, Lee Han Yeol, became a victim of state brutality ending up in a coma after a tear gas grenade penetrated his skull. This secondary victim propelled the whole country in to month long demonstrations during the spring to demand a new constitution. In June of 1987, the government succumbed to public demands and in October the adoption of the new constitution marked the beginning of Sixth Republic, South Korea's present day government. In December of 1987, Roh Tae Woo was elected president ending the military dictatorship that ruled from 1961. For the students of the 1980s, the adoption of the new constitution was a long fought win that again showcased the strengths of the college students ability to organize and change the nations course.

#### **D. Student Movements in the 2000s & 2010s: New Era Protest Models and Post Democratic Transition**

The previous case study concludes on the 1980s, recapping the decade that brought South Korea to its present governmental structure, the Sixth Republic. This last case study skips ten years, briefly highlighting the 1993 election, but wanting to remain focused on student movements and democracy of the 2000s and 2010s. These are two separate decades but for those that grew up between both these eras it is hard to create a dividing line between the two time frames. More importantly, a new generation of students that were raised in a post-authoritarian era now occupies the focus of this research. This generational difference is a key factor in the last evolutionary spoke that turns wheel of student movements as technology progression and decades of economic progress creates a new lens of national identity.

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<sup>67</sup> Han, Sung Joo; 52

National consciousness in the previous decades required knowledge of the suffering of the other parts of the nation and a common overarching cause to fight against, such as dictatorships, to build around. Moving into the 1990s and onwards, national consciousness began to shape around how South Korea acted as an international player firmly moving away a dependent state to an independent state. In 1993, Kim Young Sam was elected to office in a moment that is often heralded as the beginning of democratic South Korea. At his inaugural address on February 25, 1993, President Kim announced that he wanted to create a “new Korea” focused on rooting out corruption, revitalizing the economy, and restoring national discipline.<sup>68</sup> The commitment to bringing the country into a new era was largely treated as political rhetoric but he swiftly took steps to enact his promises. Kim Young Sam faced a number of obstacles primarily Chun Doo Hwan and Roh Tae Woo’s continued military and political deep entrenchment both in and out of government.<sup>69</sup> But Kim also had factors that aided his goals, his knowledge of government since his election to the National Assembly in 1954 and the decline in the radical elements of the labor and student movements that had propelled them for so long. Lee and Sohn state that the larger public “clearly wanted” an end to the “vicious cycle” of state repression and reactionary protest movements. The 1990s saw the end of the protest style that grew and evolved during a dictatorial era and would be reborn in the 2000s ready to handle a new style of government and new issues.

The 2000s are a distinct time period in the change from the violent, mass protests that often ended in police violence to peaceful, candlelight protests. The first protest of the new “candlelight vigils” started in 2002 with the death of thirteen-year-old students, Sin Hyo Sun and

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<sup>68</sup> (Lee and Sohn 1994)

<sup>69</sup> Lee and Sohn

Sim Mi Son, who were hit by a military vehicle driven by two U.S. soldiers.<sup>70</sup> In the introduction to her work, *Igniting the Youth: Youth and Activism in Post Authoritarian South Korea*, Jiyeon Kang states that the deaths of the two girls saddled South Koreans with a different sense of national identity in the wake of a World Cup tournament the country cohosted with Japan. In contrast to the World Cup tournament acting as a symbol of economic and global growth, the girls' death acted as a different but equally intense symbol of South Korea's position. Citizens now saw the country as a "client state still suffering from the remnants of the Cold War era."<sup>71</sup> Now with technology at their fingertips, students took to the internet expanding the tragedy from a local story to a national issue. One internet user's heartfelt letter to the deceased and a proposition for a candlelight vigil went viral sparking a new era of protest movement and formation unlike all previous decades.

The deaths of Sin Hyo Sun and Sim Mi Son became the opening for student protests that laid dormant during the beginning of the Sixth Republic. On November 23, 2002, more than ten thousand Internet users answered the proposal and filled downtown Seoul where World Cup celebrations had previously been held. This method of online communication and mass gathering proved to be effective as the method was repeatedly used by college and high school students alike. By 2008, Kang notes that the candlelight protests had consolidated into a recognizable protest "repertoire." Jiyeon Kang's claim is that through "igniting the internet," these protest showed the power of online community and its ability to forge "distinct communicative dynamics" without conforming to political discourse.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> (Kang 2016), 1

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 2

<sup>72</sup> Kang., 4

Modifying Kang's claim that in the new millennium and onwards, the rise of internet based communication improved and facilitated greater connectivity between students. As the previous sections have shown, creating communications networks was a vital part of protest formation in the 1970s and the 1980s. The ability to disseminate information and mobilize took several months of planning but the increase of technology allowed for new protest models to be formed and enacted within hours. Kang focuses on "captivation" particularly the ability to share photos and links to generate buzz and discussion. She centers her theory that captivation is a driving factor in Internet-based protests, but previous protests experienced similar captivating features that sparked protesters to mobilize. Ultimately, her work on documenting and researching the protest models of the 2000s is key to unpacking the last decade's impact on democracy.

The new impact on democracy comes from a critical juncture that the students born in the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s was the first generation to *live* in a democracy rather than fight for it as many of the students prior did.<sup>73</sup> For the internet-born protest of the early 2000s, students could engage in national politics with fewer preconceptions and limitations on what they may achieve. The new protest model of the candlelight protest exists more in the form of voicing a collective opinion rather than salient desire to revolutionize as previous protest did before. Kang states that the candlelight vigil protest held a "Rashomon-like effect" on participants where the retrospective narratives from multiple witnesses contradicted each other's. The retrospective narratives that Kang found through interviews signaled, "liberation from legacies of authoritarian-era movement culture."<sup>74</sup> The repertoire for protest went through a gradual change and came out as a peaceful and often fun event for its participants.

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<sup>73</sup> Kang., 23

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 85

The peaceful event-filled protests naturally filtered into the political arena, they did not redefine democracy or demand changes but showed the expectations that Presidential candidates must live up to. The 2002 presidential election of Roh Moo Hyun became the first candlelight protest to steer democratic values in the new millennium of South Korea. By 2002, half of the country's thirty-five million voters were Koreans in their twenties and thirties.<sup>75</sup> This demographic change was the first of its kind for the nation, as now a sizable population of the country did not have the memory of the Korean War or of a credible threat from North Korea. The lack of memory or perceived threat hindered the use of 'red scare' tactics to win elections as claims of national security would not sway the young voters. The candlelight vigils of the 2002 election showed a "captivation" with Roh's mannerism and political beliefs allowing many Internet users to project their desires onto his platform. The deaths of the thirteen-year-old girls stirred anti-American sentiments within the nation's youth and Roh's calls for the removal of the U.S. military melded together in these candlelight vigils, a force that pinned Roh's rival into an unwinnable position. Roh Moo Hyun's election to office showed movement away from past political tactics and into new ground where the youth voice and vote could change the political game.

The 2002 election candlelight protests and other protests regarding national events such as increases in college tuition, the importation of U.S. beef, and condemnation of KCIA have become the norm for the 2000s and 2010s. The use of this protest model, a peaceful event organized through online connectivity has spurred faster reactions to events and greater vocalization of collective dissent. The 2000s saw the candlelight protests that garnered direct responses from the government such as the influence in the election discussed earlier, a national

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 68

apology from 2012 President Lee Myung Bak and resignation of cabinet members. The importance of its use in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century context shows the ability to voice dissent without needing dramatic social unrest and chaos as the country experienced into the 1980s. The closest South Korea in its post authoritarianism era came to social upheaval regarding democratic values was the impeachment of President Park Geun Hye, the daughter of former President Park Chung Hee.

As with previous protests, college-aged students were at the core of the protests surrounding Park Geun Hye's impeachment. The start one of the biggest presidential impeachment scandals in the world laid in a university policy change at South Korea's most prestigious woman's university, Ewha Woman's University. The university decided to create a new degree program, one that granted degrees to working women without prior experience in higher education.<sup>76</sup> At the time when news coverage of the on-campus protest broke its escalation to a presidential impeachment was unimaginable. In an article by The Korea Herald, only five days into on-campus protests, more than 700 students filled the main campus "calling for dialogue" with the university's dean, Choi Kyung Hee. The new program, Future LiFE College, was criticized by students for "reproducing the exact hierarchy of elitism" through insinuating that a degree is "paramount proof of practical expertise" while disregarding the university's 130 year history for a profit.<sup>77</sup> The profit comes the program being government backed and Ewha receiving \$2.7 million USD for its participation. At this time there was no link between Park Geun Hye and Choi Kyung Hee but that would soon unfold dramatically on a national scale.

At the beginning of the student-led on-campus protests, Choi Kyung Hee requested police intervention to quell the growing dissent. It was a move similar to the past actions of the

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<sup>76</sup> Lim 2016

<sup>77</sup> Lim 2016

military dictators attempting to stop students of acting against corruption. Alumni of the university began to investigate Choi Kyung Hee, concerned that this “unilateral and hostile attitude” was an attempt to cover deeper possible wrongdoings.<sup>78</sup> What came from this investigation was a shocking truth: Ewha Woman’s University favoritism to an equestrian athlete, the daughter of the President’s secretive confidante, Choi Choon Sil. Chung Yoo Ra, the daughter, received such high degrees of favoritism that South Korea’s parliament and a special prosecution team decided on further investigation. The investigation resulted in the Choi Kyung Hee and several professors being indicted on criminal charges along with the termination of Chung Yoo Ra’s admission.

Waves of protests erupted as students who prepare their whole lives for college exams saw a blatant abuse of power by Ewha Woman’s University. The anger that rolled through the nation created one of the largest popular movements in the recent history of South Korea. For Choi Soon Sil, the corruption within Ewha Woman’s University was the tip of the iceberg in larger brewing scandal with former President Park Geun Hye. Investigation results found a deep connection between Choi and Park that lead to government policies and business deals. Choi Soon Sil had advised the president on numerous policies without any credentials or authorization and moved as far as colluding on business deals with South Korean conglomerate such as Samsung.<sup>79</sup> As more and more information began to circulate within the nation there was no way to avoid the events that came to follow.

The Candlelight Revolution, originating from a small college campus protest, brought South Korea to the center of the world stage as citizens demanded the impeachment of Park Geun Hye. The student role in this massive protest has left experts regarding their initial

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<sup>79</sup> Dudden

demands as key to impeachment. Lee Taek Gwang, Professor of Cultural Studies at Kyunghee University claims that “things would not have moved so quickly” if it were not for these college students.<sup>80</sup> The Candlelight Revolution has entranced the whole world as sixteen million of South Korea’s thirty-five million population converged to protest Park Geun Hye’s corruption for twenty consecutive Saturday’s. The 2016 protests, like many of the new model candlelight protests, followed the peaceful almost party-like atmosphere that marked the movement away from protests of the past. The protests held street posters, newspaper cartoons, TV skit, blogs, outrageous sculpture, and performance pieces that maintained morale despite the worst of winter weather.<sup>81</sup> The protests started on October 29, 2016, by November 26, 2016, 1.9 million protesters were participating nationwide. The December 6, 2016, protests saw an estimated 2.32 million people in the streets of Seoul, making it the largest protest in the nation’s history.<sup>82</sup>

The Candlelight Revolution proved to be historic in numerous ways as the commitment of hundreds of thousands of citizens convinced the Parliament voting 234 to 56 to impeach Park Geun Hye and an 8 to 0 vote by the constitutional court to uphold the rule. For the new generation, the Candlelight Revolution symbolized decades of corruption, anger with academia, classist society, and so much more that needed to be changed. Lee Byoung Hoon, a professor of sociology at Chungang University remarked that this moment was an opportunity for South Korea democracy to mature believing that “it was [the] South Korean people who forced lawmakers to end their political power game, listen to the public and join forces to remove President Park from office.”<sup>83</sup> As the protests are viewed as strong example the growth of the

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<sup>80</sup> CBC

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nation's democracy stepping out of its authoritarian history, the question is what would it have taken for history to repeat itself?

After Park Geun Hye's trial and arrest, news broke that the military considered declaring martial law. As much of this thesis has recounted, the authoritarian governments first step to controlling student unrest and general public dissent was to declare martial law. Park Geun Hye prior to the development of the scandal, worked to limit press and artistic freedoms since her 2013 election. Post her impeachment, details of a "Blacklist" surfaced that listed nearly ten thousand filmmakers, writers, artists, and academics deemed "anti-government" who were denied state funding during President Park's term.<sup>84</sup> From the beginning Park Geun Hye implemented authoritarian style policies and this military backing is all too reminiscent of her father, Park Chung Hee.

The report was written by the Defense Security Command, the counter-terrorism and counter-intelligence agency, and detailed a plan to mobilize "military resources" and "soldiers" including 200 tanks, 550 armored vehicles, 4,800-armed troops and 1,400 special forces.<sup>85</sup> This reactionary decision to use force reminded many of the Kwangju massacre of 1980, including Lee Tae Hoon, Director of the Center for Military Human Rights Korea. Lee Cheol Hee of the ruling Democratic Party of Korea remarked in an interview with CBS Radio:

"The candlelight protests were praised as an example of a peaceful demonstration without any signs of violence. The citizens exercised their own rights at the protests and the military viewed it as something they need to crush."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Dudden

<sup>85</sup> Lee, 2018

<sup>86</sup> Lee 2018

As Lee Cheol Hee states, the reaction to deploy military force on the certain belief that the impeachment ruling would get overruled by the constitutional court shows that behind closed doors there is still much to change.

The Republic of Korea, since its liberation from Japan and the end of the Korean War has rolled through a tumultuous journey of finding a national identity and a structure that embodies the freedoms they have fought for. South Korea in 2018, under the new presidency of Moon Jae In, has worked hard from the perspective of government policy and the perspective of citizens demanding social and political accountability. Post the Candlelight Revolution; the protests for a better nation have not stopped with rallies for women's rights following the inception of #MeToo Movement taking root in Seoul and other cities. But now, the world and government has seen the strength in numbers and would be wise to make change as the world turns into new era under Trump and Peace talks for the Korea's.

## **VI. Analysis**

The results of the case study show that for the majority of contemporary South Korean political history student movements have held a large impact on (1) motivating the larger population to take political action and (2) to push the government to accountability as representatives of the population. In the face of corruption and state violence, college students took their education and demanded a change from the regimes in power. The generational impact of student activism grew social movements in a number of sectors allowing for social organization and the creations of unions in the face of scares of communism. The work that each decade put into championing democracy created a chance for the generations after to achieve more than the previous. The unrest that arose from the student movements were necessary during

the authoritarian regimes as peaceful protests would not have pushed these regimes to change or react in the ways they did. The force of student movements played a substantial role in bringing South Korea to truly standing on the international stage as both the government and citizens dreamed of decades ago. Looking to the future, the new direction of protests-- quick and technologically advanced-- shows there is still much left for generations to come to rally around.

The results of these findings shows that moving forward the impact of student-led protest movements will not decrease but instead will adapt to the changing South Korean landscape, as the country moves into demanding cultural and social equality. The history of South Korea saw a rapid increase in economy surrounding industrialization and class stratification with the creation of chaebols. The cultural growth that normally occurs along with industrialization is now catching up with South Korea, many political theorists have noted that the focus on the economy and national security regarding North Korea has prevented politics to take shape around social issues such as LGBT+, education reform, and the aging population. With Moon Jae In's election, the protest that have occurred so far during his presidency have focused on larger issues that have been ignored under a highly patriarchy, collectivist society. The #MeToo Movement's growth in South Korea was the first example of the force and fervor that protests surrounding social issues will progress within the years to come.

Switching from impacting the political arena regarding government accountability to impacting the political arena regarding proper representation and protection is logical and necessary step in a building a truly democratic state. The case study has shown through different decades and different political regimes that the motivation to realize goals by college students should not be underestimated and in this ever-changing and increasingly connected global society it is important to treat the voices of this generation with sincerity as they are next to make

decisions regarding society. On a larger global scale, this holds equally true as many societies face demands from a change from its higher educated demographic. Within the United States, the difference in higher education has made it difficult to unify as students in South Korea have done but with March For Our Lives and Black Lives Matter solidarity walk-outs or on-campus marches take place across the nation. The student protests are not meant to be a model as the events surrounding their inception are unique to the formation and political growth of South Korea, but these protest can serve as inspiration and guidance for the future.

In terms of the future of this particular study, it would be beneficial to do a study on why South Koreans have a strong protest culture but there is no crossover into electing officials that can provide a substantial change in the areas they often protest about. South Korea has one of the highest voter turnout rates due to it being a social norm to vote and be active in politics. A study that could properly show why there is a disconnect between protests, voter turnout, and elected officials would better explore the political arena and the impact of protesting in South Korea. Ideally, this study would have to take a detailed account of South Korean parties and their platforms then connect these platforms to how the population is voting regarding issues that have been protested in public space. A prominent research question would be if the nation has yet to see a truly liberal candidate that will campaign along the brewing social inequality issues or if politicians are too conservative to take a strong liberal platform risking election. If given the time, I would like to investigate the age-related politics playing into campaign platforms that could be potentially playing into the disconnect between protests and votes. This larger and far more long-term study would demand a detailed investigation of the current political climate using political theory to organize. This study has the potential to unlock and properly connect protests to proper voting patterns to further democracy and representation in South Korea.

## VII. Conclusion

The history of South Korean democracy has been held together by the goals and determination of South Korean college-age students. This thesis, in its attempt to answer how college students have impacted South Korean democracy, has shown that student-led protests created a repertoire for which subsequent generations will base their protests. These students were able to push the government to acknowledge their demands and give impetus to the remainder of the population to demand change alongside them, while creating space for other social movements to take root. Each decade -starting from the cornerstone event of the 4-19 revolt against Syngman Rhee in 1960- has incorporated aspects from the generation before, while adapting to the regime in power. This thesis has also shown the reactionary violence that the authoritarian regimes of Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan relied on to quell student dissidence. The use of state violence in turn showed that student-led protests were a credible threat to the stability and longevity of the regime. With the collapse of the Fifth Republic in 1987, this threat became a reality.

This thesis created a comprehensive view of student-led protests including the changes that occurred in the post-democratic state of South Korea. The inclusion of the 2000s Candlelight vigils, and the most recent mass demonstration for the impeachment of Park Geun Hye rounds out the research of this thesis. Altogether, this thesis contributes to international studies and social theory with a panoramic view of the importance of the college-age demographic for South Korea in its future, and the underestimated position they have held in South Korea's past. To conclude, South Korean democracy is strongly influenced by their youth and it is essential to give their voices proper attention. This work hopes to inform and inspire a more serious look at

the role of college education in social movements on a global scale, along with how the future of politics and social theory will be impacted by younger generations in the years to come.

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