

The Candlelight Girls' Playground: Nationalism as Art of Dialogy, The 2008 Candlelight Vigil Protests in South Korea

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"The Republic of Korea is a democratic republic! All of the Republic of Korea's powers are from its citizens!"¹ These words come from "The Constitution Article One," a song that, along with popular protest songs from the 1970s and '80s democratization movements, was widely sung during the 2008 Candlelight Vigil protests. The reappearance of earlier protest songs reflects not only the citizens' recurring memories of Korea's previous democratization movements, but also their ongoing struggle for democracy. In this paper, I explore how the diverse group of Koreans who participated in the Candlelight Vigil protests attempted to re-make the Korean nation-state outside the framework of existing politics by integrating the notion of democratic civil society with their creative, cultural, and tactical dissent.² Here, they aspired to re-envision their national community as a place where citizens directly intervene in the political decision-making process through everyday civil discourse, in opposition to the incommunicative government of Lee Myung-bak (2007-2012).³

In examining the Candlelight Vigil protest of June 10, 2008, held in commemoration of the June 10 Democratization Movement in

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¹ In my discussion, I will use the terms citizens and people interchangeably.

² I will alternately refer to the participants of the Candlelight Vigil protests as the Candlelight protesters, Candlelight participants, or Candlelighters.

³ The Candlelight protesters' imagining of a new democratic civil society can be conceptualized in terms of both Jürgen Habermas's notion of the public sphere and Gerard A. Hauser's rhetorical model of public spheres. Habermas defines the public sphere as a discursive space in which individuals and groups discuss their shared concerns and reach decisions, thereby influencing political action. Likewise, the Candlelighters actively participated in communal discussion in order to influence and intervene in current political discourse. In addition, as Hauser argues, "a plurality of publics within the Public Sphere" interlaces itself and creates a common ground through dialogue. In a similar fashion, the Candlelighters effectively create an on- and offline network by conjoining their plural issues with "a common reference world." Gerard A. Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetorics of Publics and Public Spheres* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 56.

1987, I argue that the Candlelight protesters deliberately sought to reformulate Korean nationalism in the conflict between their conception of democracy and the market economy. In addition, the Candlelight protesters' nationalism was very much shaped by the Internet and online networks in the era of globalization, so it robustly challenged the earlier conception Korean nationalism that was much influenced by the conventional concept of the national boundary. The Candlelights imagined their nationalism as a dialogical point within the context of international collaborations struggling against the ever-growing prominence of neo-liberalism and collectively working towards a globalized world in which they want to live. Nevertheless, the protesters' imagining of their nationalism outside of the conventional political system had somewhat limited their potential for reworking the current socioeconomic structure.

REMAKING A COUNTERPUBLIC SPHERE

The Candlelight Vigil protests articulated multiple changes and contentions made in the post-1987 democratization movement, especially in South Korean progressive politics. Although the Candlelight protesters identified with and reenacted the earlier democratization movement, they also critically challenged the nationalism that had been actively mobilized, especially during the 1970s and '80s. In order to situate the protests in such a social milieu, I will first look at the 1980s *undongkweon*, which the historian Lee Namhee has framed as a counterpublic.⁴

A term that refers to an individual activist or the *minjung* (or people's) movement, *undongkweon* denotes the creation of a separate and competing "counterpublic sphere" in which the norms and values differed from those commonly associated with the public.⁵ The *undongkweon*'s counterpublic sphere was often portrayed as "marginal" and "insignificant" by the mass media and government, and even as ideologically threatening to the rest of society.⁶ They actively carved out their community through their distinctive discourse, values, ceremonies, and culture in opposition or as an

⁴ Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 8.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

alternative to the dominant culture and values.⁷ In this way, the *undongkweon*'s counterpublic stance was crucial not only in forming its counter-identity but also in enabling them to envision "an emancipatory program for the whole of society" as an integral part of the development of civil society.⁸

In opposition to the state's nationalism, these intellectuals and university students envisioned *minjung* as the sovereign power of the Korean people's nation-state. They defined the idea of *minjung* as "the common people," in opposition to the elites, the educated, and the state; thus, the *minjung* is conceptualized as being alienated from the political decision-making process and from capitalist production, at the same time as its constituents serve as the building blocks of capitalist society.⁹ They are a "group" that cannot be neatly categorized within existing notions of classes or other specific social groups, and yet they were capable of rising up in opposition to "the meta-narrative of state-led development" as "a true historical subjectivity."¹⁰ Nonetheless, the idea of *minjung*, a sweeping term that purports to represent all of the oppressed, tends to gloss over particular problems of other social minorities such as women, prioritizing its political agendas over others.

When defined by its dynamic engagement with historical reality, the dissidents' idea of *minjung* is firmly grounded in their perception of modern Korean history, particularly in its failure to build a sovereign nation-state after liberation in 1945. The dissidents perceived that the legitimate foundation of the Republic of Korea was obstructed by the re-entry of pro-Japanese collaborators into politics, anti-communism, the division of the nation into South and North Korea under the U.S. Army Military Administration, and dictatorships and foreign interventions.¹¹ For that reason, the

⁷ Won Kim, *Ich'yojin kottul e taehan kieok: 1980-yondae Hanguk taehaksaeng ui hawi munhwa wa taejung chongch'i* [Remembering forgotten things: the 1980s South Korean university students' sub-culture and the public politics] (Seoul: Ihu, 1999). 76. All quotations from Korean texts have been translated by the author.

⁸ Lee, *The Making of Minjung*, 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 5, 6.

¹¹ Since their establishment as separate states, South and North Korea have had ideological, political, and military confrontations under a constant threat of war. Moreover, their politics have been heavily affected by the complex interests of the United States, Russia, China, and Japan, each fighting for hegemony in East Asia since the Cold War. The anti-communist and pro-United States South Korean government saw communism and North Korea as diametrically opposed to democracy and modernization. As a way to claim legitimacy over North Korea, expounding strong anti-communism, the state mobilized the entire nation for rapid modernization and industrialization following the 1960s under a military dictatorship that severely infringed on the constitutional rights of many Korean people.

legitimacy of the foundation of the Republic of Korea and the undemocratic regimes that followed (1948-1992) has long been contested.

Unlike the *undongkweon*, the Candlelighters harbored no doubts about the legitimacy of the Republic of Korea per se as their nation-state. Because the Grand National Party's presidential candidate Lee Myung-bak was democratically elected by a majority of voters in 2007, legitimacy should not have been a problem in principle. However, because the Candlelight participants perceived that Lee's government did not represent the interests of the citizens or listen to their expressions of concern—instead heeding the interests of the establishment and the U.S.—they challenged its legitimacy as their state. The protesters believed that they needed to guide the government to work properly, and that if it did not listen to its citizens, it should be overthrown to make way for a new state.

Nonetheless, the Candlelight protesters were skeptical about aligning with dissident nationalism and its progressive politics, not only because they had failed to deliver their promises even after democratization (1987), but also because their approach to current socioeconomic problems differed little from those of the conservative party. Although the Candlelight participants shared, as well, a yearning for a people's nation-state, if the *undongkweon* imagined its nationalism in the meta-narrative of "the nation, *minjung*, and democracy," the Candlelight protesters re-imagined their national community in their everyday civil discourse through self-organization.

Their refusal to align with conventional leftist or rightist politics and their creative form of dissent bears a natural affinity to the Italian Autonomia movement, which emerged in the early 1960s and dominated left-wing politics and social action in Italy in the 1970s. Like the Candlelight protest movement, Autonomia diverged from traditional left-wing politics. It grew into a political and social movement that expanded beyond activist factory workers (the usual socialist or communist constituency of post-war Europe) to embrace others that it considered to be alienated from capitalist economy. The Autonomists included intellectuals, unemployed youth, precarious (non-union) workers, and even housewives, who were viewed as unpaid laborers. Unlike traditional Marxists, who acted through party politics and trade unions, they spurned rigid ideology and hierarchical organization. Instead, the Autonomists attempted to disrupt the existing socioeconomic structure through decentralized wildcat strikes and other actions, in effect reinventing "their own

forms of social 'war-fair'" through pranks, squats, pirate radio broadcasts, collective re-appropriations, and so on, reflecting the rebellious spirit of May 1968.¹² Their movement, in which the literary critic and cultural theorist Sylvère Lotringer saw a future politics, articulated "a new form of political behavior, experimental and imaginative, ideologically open, rhizomatic in organization, non-representational and non-dialectical in action, with a healthy sense of humor and zest for life."¹³

Like the Autonomists, the Candlelighters attempted to re-envision their nation-state by realizing democratic aspirations in their everyday lives with their cultural and political dissent. Here, "everyday" can be read as "ordinary," a concept developed in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* by the South African scholar and literary author Njabulo Ndebele. Ndebele argues that the ordinary is antithetical to spectacle and embodies lived realities that are profoundly embedded in everyday life.¹⁴ He asserts that a meta-narrative of freedom that does not engage with the concrete realities of people is paradoxically destined to be dialectically equivalent to the oppressive apartheid system.¹⁵ In other words, when the people's intimate lives and stories are subsumed by the goal of the anti-apartheid movement, their lives can be easily manipulated and instrumentalized for the sake of ideological and political logic. Instead, the ordinary daily lives of the people, "the very content of the struggle," should be the basis for the collective imagining and creation of the future through a continuous process of collaboration between individuals and groups in their everyday lives.¹⁶

Ndebele's theory of the ordinary speaks to the Candlelight protesters' deliberations, particularly how they conceptualize everyday life, not only as a powerful thrust for a collective re-envisioning of their nation-state, but also as a place where their activism is rearticulated in the everyday practice of democracy. The Candlelight protesters enacted the idea of the everyday practice of democracy through free, boundless exchanges of thoughts, opinions, and information in a common arena, such as the online community Daum Agora, envisioning a democratic civil society in these

¹² Hedi El Kholi, Sylvère Lotringer, and Christian Marazzi, *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics* (Los Angeles and Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2007), v.

¹³ *Ibid.*, vi.

¹⁴ Njabulo Ndebele, *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 50.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

activities. The protesters expressed such an ideal of democracy in their action of civil disobedience in front of the shipping container barricade on June 10, 2008. By doing so, they projected their aspirations within a counterpublic space for their new national community. Before looking into their community-making actions, I will examine the socioeconomic background in South Korea following the 1987 democratization.

POST-1987 SOUTH KOREA

The Ch'eonggye Plaza was flooded on May 17, 2008 with thousands of lit candles, offering a magnificent spectacle. The Ch'eonggye Plaza was created by the Ch'eonggyech'eon reclamation project during Lee Myung-bak's tenure as Mayor of Seoul (2002-2006), and it was considered his most visible achievement. However, it became the site of protests against his government that night in 2008, as a banner was unfurled reading: "No Mad Cow, No Mad Education!" Men and women, young and old, came with their families and friends and sat on the ground in the packed space, enjoying performances by popular singers, as if they were at a summer picnic. In the middle of the concert, the audiences shared their ideas on current politics and others responded with enthusiastic applause and speeches of their own. It was not only through speeches and anti-2MB pamphlets that people showed their opposition ("2MB" is a derisive nickname for President Lee that pokes fun at his brain capacity—2 megabytes); many people also brought their own signboards and wore costumes as gestures of protest, for example cow costumes (presumably representing mad cows) and masks from the movie *V for Vendetta*.

The Candlelight cultural festivals, which would develop into the Candlelight Vigil protests, were started less than one hundred days into Lee Myung-bak's presidential term (2007-2012). Lee, the candidate from the Grand National Party, was elected president in December 2007. His election was expected, not only because the preceding president Roh Moo-hyun and his Progressive Party had failed to represent the people's interests in a term that began in 2002, but also because the 1987 democratization movement had not successfully represented the people's interests in building a new democratic society and establishing socioeconomic justice, a state of



Figure 1. The Candlelight Cultural Festival at Ch'onggye Plaza, 2008. Photograph by Kim Yunki.



Figure 2. The Candlelight Cultural Festival at Ch'onggye Plaza, 2008. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

affairs widely believed to have worsened as a result of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) intervention (1997).

During the ten years following democratization, the growing middle class became a new civic power and the country enjoyed a period of economic flourishing. Nevertheless, from the mid-1990s on, there were already serious symptoms that suggested economic depression was under way in South Korea.¹⁷ The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis (also known as the IMF crisis) hit South Korea and other Asian countries hard. Faced with a major financial emergency, the South Korean government received a bailout loan package totaling \$57 billion from the IMF in December 1997. The day the government decided to accept the IMF package became known for many Koreans as a "National Humiliation Day":¹⁸ South Korea's economic sovereignty was handed over to the IMF, under the usual terms for economic reform.¹⁹ Many Koreans tied the issue of economic sovereignty to national pride, so they enthusiastically participated in pan-national movements by collecting gold and dollars for the revival of Korea's economy; this became known as "IMF Nationalism."²⁰

Although the IMF crisis united Koreans through their collective efforts to regain Korea's sovereignty, it violently broke apart their everyday lives in a way no one had expected, causing a daily suicide rate of twenty-five people and a fifty percent increase in the crime rate.²¹ As the central goal of the IMF reform package was to make the labor market more flexible, salaried workers suffered under a bleak job market and economic slump. As a result, the middle class became more focused on the success of family members. The rhetoric of competition dominated all aspects of people's lives as never before. The conservatism of the middle class rapidly separated the civil and labor union movements, resulting in the exclusion of workers' interests and perspectives from the formation of political discourse.²²

¹⁷ Hagen Koo, "Engendering Civil Society: The Role of the Labor Movement," in *Korean Society: Civil Society, Democracy and the State*, ed. Charles K. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 2007), 86.

¹⁸ Kim Yeonghwan, "Wigi ui hanguksahoe reul wihan silcheonjeok je'an" [Practical Suggestions for the Korean Society in Crisis], in *Sahoe pip'yong* (Spring 1999), 150.

¹⁹ Cheong Kyuchae, Kim Seongtaek, "Oehwadaeran teukpyol chwijaeitim," in *I saramdeul cheongmal keunil naegetkkun: Silrok wehwa daeran* [The record of foreign currency crisis] (Seoul: Hanguk kyeongjae sinmunsa, 1998), 227–28.

²⁰ Kang chun-man, *Hanguk hyondaesa sanchaek. 1990-yondae pyon: 3-dang hapdang eso sutabeoksu kkaji*, [The contemporary Korean history, 1990s: from merging three parties to Starbucks Coffee], no. 3 (Seoul: Inmul gwa sasangsa, 2006), 173.

²¹ Kang, *Hanguk hyondaesa sanchaek. 1990-yondae pyon*, no. 3, 182.

²² Chang Jip Ch'oe, *Minjuhwa ihu ui minjujuui: Hanguk minjujuui ui posujeok kiwon gwa wigi*, [Democracy after democracy: the conservative origins of Korean democracy and its crisis]. 198.

This meant that civil society had lost the biggest latent force of resistance against business conglomerates (including mass media powers) and the government.²³ As several commentators have pointed out, many factions in the civil movements became apolitical and did not bring class-consciousness to the forefront, focusing instead on the interests of the educated middle class.

Nonetheless, these developments reflect changes in the social movements of the late 1980s and 1990s. After democratization, many activists and social organizations found it difficult to replicate their earlier mass mobilizations because there was no common target, as there had been in the pre-1987 era.²⁴ As a result, new civil associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to work with the emerging civil society. These civil society groups addressed a wide range of new social issues, and their members included ordinary citizens, journalists, professors, social workers, artists, and farmers.²⁵ The development of grassroots NGOs accelerated rapidly and spread nationwide, ushered in by the new national online network.

THE LEE GOVERNMENT'S DEAFNESS

Globalization and neo-liberalism tightened their influence over Koreans, and their effects were deeply felt in everyday life. Under these circumstances, Lee Myung-bak's promise to promote the resurgence of Korea's economy was eagerly received by the public. However, many of his policies, such as the liberalization of education and the privatization of medical insurance and other public services, provided little benefit to the average Korean. Furthermore, his ambition to create the pan-Korea Grand Waterway was anti-ecological and public work-based, which seemed to repeat the 1960s and '70s style of economic development. The people were forced to confront the reality that the government's vision for the nation-state clashed with that of the people.

²³ Ibid.; The separation of the middle class and the labor workers should not be understood as a particular result of the IMF crisis but should instead be perceived as evidence of the middle class's innate conservatism, which was also manifested in the General Labor Strikes of July, August, and September 1987.

²⁴ Sunhyuk Kim, "Civil society and democratization in South Korea", *Korean Society: Civil society, democracy and the state*, second edition, edited by Charles K. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 2007), 59.

²⁵ Ibid., 61.

Above all, what brought about strong opposition to the Lee administration, eager to create a better relationship with the United States, was its decision to import U.S. beef. Such importation included meat and other body parts from thirty month-old cattle that had been banned from the U.S. food supply because of the perceived high risk of mad cow disease. Many Koreans were incensed at the government's humiliating deal with the United States, particularly its failure to protect its population, and indeed its apparent indifference to food safety. However, the government did not renegotiate the agreement, prioritizing economic logic and South Korea's ties with the United States above all else. Many people believed that the government's deafness to the desires of its citizens led directly to this decision and was the biggest obstacle to true democracy in Korea. They viewed the unresponsiveness of the government as undemocratic and, instead, envisioned democracy as an everyday civil discourse among people of varied opinions.

FORMING NEW POLITICAL VOICES

When Lee's government announced the liberalization of education at almost the same time as it signed the U.S. beef import agreement in 2008, many female junior high and high school students, who were already living under severe pressure to achieve academically, called the current education system "mad education," comparing it to the beef import in their slogan "No Mad Education, No Mad Cow!" The young students, known as the Candlelight Girls, appropriated social media and used it for creating political dissent. Their creative and techno-savvy methods of networking represented a new form of protest to many people, although these technologies had existed for a while.

Unlike their parents' generation, the so-called "386 generation,"²⁶ these students had already lived in a democratized society.²⁷ The historian Han Honggu states that their parents'

²⁶ The term "386 generation," which was coined in the 1990s, refers to the generation that experienced the dawning of the democratization movement during the 1980s student movement.

²⁷ See: Han Honggu, "Hyeondae hanguk ui jeohang undong gwa chotpul" [South Korea's Resistance Movement and the Candlelighters], in *Changjak kkwa pip'yeong* 36 (Fall 2008), 18-19; Kim Jongyeop, "Chotpu rui kyeongjaehakgwa 87-yeon cheje" [The Candlelighters' Resistance and the 1997 System], in *Changjak kkwa pip'yeong* 36 (Fall 2008), 3.

generation studied democracy and struggled for it harder than any generation had since the foundation of the Korean nation. However, they were more familiar with the operations of the authoritarian system. In contrast, these young students might not have had clear ideas of democracy, but they responded to democracy as part of their daily life. For many young students, democracy was not just another political ideology or catchphrase, as was the case with conventional politics; instead, democracy was the way in which they expected their society, or the Republic of Korea, to function.²⁸

In the process of creating dissent against Lee's government, a netizen (or citizen of cyberspace) with the username "Andante," who identified him or herself as a high school student, started a petition to impeach President Lee on a Website called Daum Agora.²⁹ Daum Agora, the popular Web portal Daum's discussion board, selectively appropriated the concept of the ancient Greek *agora* to denote an open discussion space in which netizens could contemplate the direction and tactics of their activism in a collective manner. Andante's petition brought the people's dissatisfactions together in one arena and helped Daum Agora function as the virtual headquarters of the Candlelight Vigil protests during the summer of 2008:

With Ten Million Signatures I demand that the congress impeach President Lee. Lee Myung-bak took a solemn oath that he would work for the citizens. However, for the last three months President Lee has not devoted himself with great sincerity to national administration. He pushed the construction of the pan-Korean Grand Waterway and immersive English education, which many people have resisted. . . . Also, by changing or ignoring the election promises, he deceived the people. . . . He said he will not charge Japan with responsibility for the colonial past. . . . As he referred to the king of Japan as the "emperor," he bowed low to him. By using force, he violently arrested the people who were marching peacefully and enforced an announcement of the U.S. beef import. . . . The president who throws out Korea and its citizens' self-respect . . . we cannot acknowledge such a president.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ <http://agora.media.daum.net/petition/view?id=40221> (last accessed June 2010). I could not retrieve Andante's first petition for the impeachment of President Lee because he or she has updated the petition several times since then, but the original content of his petition remains in the updates.

³⁰ Ibid.

Andante's petition listed the Lee government's offenses and detailed their undemocratic nature, in addition to condemning the government's humiliating diplomacy with Japan, its former colonizer. At first glance, Andante's rhetoric appears no different from earlier forms of nationalism in its very political nature, based on its opposition to dictatorship and imperialism. However, by closely examining the protesters' on- and offline activities, we can see that the Candlelighters' particular form of nationalism aspires to re-envision a new Korean nation-state outside of conventional politics, while retaining the fundamental characteristics of constitutional democracy. In this atmosphere, Andante's petition and the police's attempt to verify his identity kindled the fire of the people's resistance against the Lee government. In less than forty days 1.3 million netizens signed the petition for the impeachment of President Lee.³¹

The initiative of these young students invited people from all walks of life to engage with everyday concerns and respond to them in a communal manner. Their exchanges evolved into the Candlelight cultural festivals at the Ch'eonggye Plaza where thousands of candles created a magnificent spectacle. The government's unresponsiveness to its citizens' desires resulted in the summer-long Candlelight Vigil protests, which were brutally combated by the police.

DIFFERENT "TRUTHS" OF THE NEWS MEDIA

Many Koreans were afraid of mad cow disease due to the extensive media coverage of the epidemic, online journalism, and citizen networks. What was known about mad cow disease became highly politicized and muddled by conflicting scientific ideas, by the news media's negligence or manipulation of "facts," and by the fear propagated through blogs and online networks. Nevertheless, the Candlelight Vigil protests were not driven simply by fear and ignorance. In the midst of the fear-mongering, the true nature of the government and the conservative news media was revealed. Although the Candlelight protesters supported the anti-government

³¹ *T'aehan minguk sangsik sacheon: Agora* [Dictionary for Common Sense in the Republic of Korea], ed. Agora pein (Seoul: Yöu wa durumi, 2008), 20.

news media, in their re-envisioning of a democratic Korean national community they also distanced themselves from progressive politics.

On April 29, 2008, PD Note broadcasted a television program on mad cow disease, titled "The American Beef, Is It Safe from the Mad Cow Disease?" The program showed alarming images of downed cattle and individuals who supposedly suffered from the human variant of mad cow disease. The program also claimed that 94 percent of Koreans have genes that can make them more susceptible to developing vCJD (variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, the human mad cow disease). However, this information had not yet been rigorously verified. The government and the conservative newspapers *Chosun*, *JoongAng*, and *DongA Daily* accused PD Note of fabricating and distorting information to manipulate public sentiment to further the leftists' political agenda.³²

The government and the conservative newspapers continued to portray the Candlelight Vigil protests as illegal, violent protests influenced by anti-government, anti-American instigators. For instance, newspaper editorials ran headlines such as "The Candlelight Vigil Protests Become Anti-Government, Illegal Protests," "The Candlelight Vigil Protests: It Should Not Spread a Banquet for Wrong Groups," "Instigation by Ghost Stories and False Information, It Goes Way Too Far," and "[The Government] Should Take a Decisive Measure Against the Violent Protests According to the Law."³³ This rhetoric gave the government a rationale for forcefully suppressing the protesters to reestablish law and order. Using nationalistic rhetoric, the government and mass media outlets accused the Candlelight protesters of undermining Korea's democracy and of causing the current economic crisis. Above all, what concerned these powers most was that many ignorant people would be alarmed by the information on mad cow disease and manipulated by anti-American and anti-government groups.

The netizens' "spreading fears" by "false information" was in actuality the Candlelighters' "tactics" to reveal the government and

³² Since their airing, the PD Note programs have been at the center of debate on the media's manipulations of public sentiment in relation to the Revision of the Media Law. The program was also charged by the citizens' legal organization and others with terrifying the people using inaccurate information, but the court rejected their petitions in 2010. Nonetheless, with the government's unilateral placement of pro-government figures as president and in other high-ranking positions in broadcasting corporations (i.e., KBS, YTN, and MBC), progressive organizations perceived the PD Note case as illustrative of the government's attempt to seize control of the news media.

³³ *T'aehan minguk sangsik sacheon: Agora* [Dictionary for Common Sense in the Republic of Korea], ed. Agora pein (Seoul: Yöu wa durumi, 2008), 191.

pro-government newspapers' real face, by imitating the news media's hyping of mad cow disease during the tenure of the liberal party's ex-President Roh Moo-hyun. The major conservative newspapers, *Chosun*, *JoongAng*, and *DongA Daily*, had warned of the danger of mad cow disease in opposition to the Roh administration's attempt to open up to the U.S. beef market a year earlier: "Koreans are genetically more susceptible to mad cow disease than Western people"; "If you eat beef from ill cattle and are infected . . . the death rate is 100%"; "What! Only Koreans eat old American beef?"³⁴ However, under the Lee government, these newspapers radically changed their position on mad cow disease, reporting the government's public statement that "The probability of mad cow disease is similar to the probability of getting a hole-in-one and getting struck by a thunderbolt at the same time."³⁵ The pro-government newspapers clearly demonstrated their willingness to switch their stance depending on their immediate political and economic interests by manipulating public sentiment, obstructing the people's access to the facts.

In the face of competing "truths" regarding mad cow disease, the protesters' agenda was not simply about opposition to importing American beef, the overthrow of the 2MB government, or revealing the mass media's manipulations. The Candlelighters' aims were more fundamental to resolving the country's deepest problem: remaking the Republic of Korea from the ground up on the basis of democratic ideals. Hence, the protesters playfully yet carefully maneuvered visual images, performances, and rhetoric to cast themselves as democratic citizens and to push the Republic of Korea closer to its ideal of a new democratic national community.

CYBERSPACE AS THE SITE FOR CONCEIVING DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP

Such massive online participation was made possible by the widespread Internet access afforded by the network infrastructure of South Korea, the most heavily connected country in the world. Extensive online availability made the Internet an effective

³⁴ Ibid., 276-281.

³⁵ http://article.joins.com/article/article.asp?total_id=3135065&ctg=1000 (last accessed June 2010).

instrument for challenging the existing political system in both creating dissent and in forming on- and offline communities committed to social mobilization. Interestingly, the Koreans' online interactions often have developed into off-line social movements, shaping and shaped by public sentiment, as the 2002 presidential election illustrates so well. When candidate Chung Mong-jun withdrew his support for Roh Moo-hyun, a reformist candidate, on the night before the election, an Internet newspaper providing citizen journalism, *ohmynews*, published an article on the new electoral development that was accessed by more than 570,000 people within the ten hours that preceded daybreak. Its discussion boards were flooded with messages urging the people to vote.³⁶ Netizens also used cell phones to urge voters to exercise their rights on Election Day, thereby helping to elect Roh as president in 2002.

As this example shows, the people's involvement in on- and offline politics in 2002 shares some similarities with the Candlelighters' online communities and activism. The immediateness of the connection between online networks and offline activism throughout the development of the Candlelight Vigil protests demonstrates not only how online communities can work with popular movements but also the tenuousness of the distinction between on- and offline communities. For instance, as a way of intervening in the pro-government news media, citizens wanted to represent their activism in their own terms. Some protesters carried their laptops, microphones, video camcorders, and cell phones into the demonstrations. While they were recording and uploading the protests in real time, they also interviewed other Candlelight protesters. People at home or in offices who could not make it to the protests responded directly to these real-time broadcasts. In turn, they often asked citizen reporters to go to certain spots where they had heard that police violence was taking place. Sometimes, if those at home or at work found things were getting serious, they came out and joined the scene of the protests—even in the middle of the night. Such citizen reporting exemplified how porous on- and offline networks were and how participants collaborated to achieve their political goals.

³⁶ Ibid, 931.



Figure 3. One-Person Reporters. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

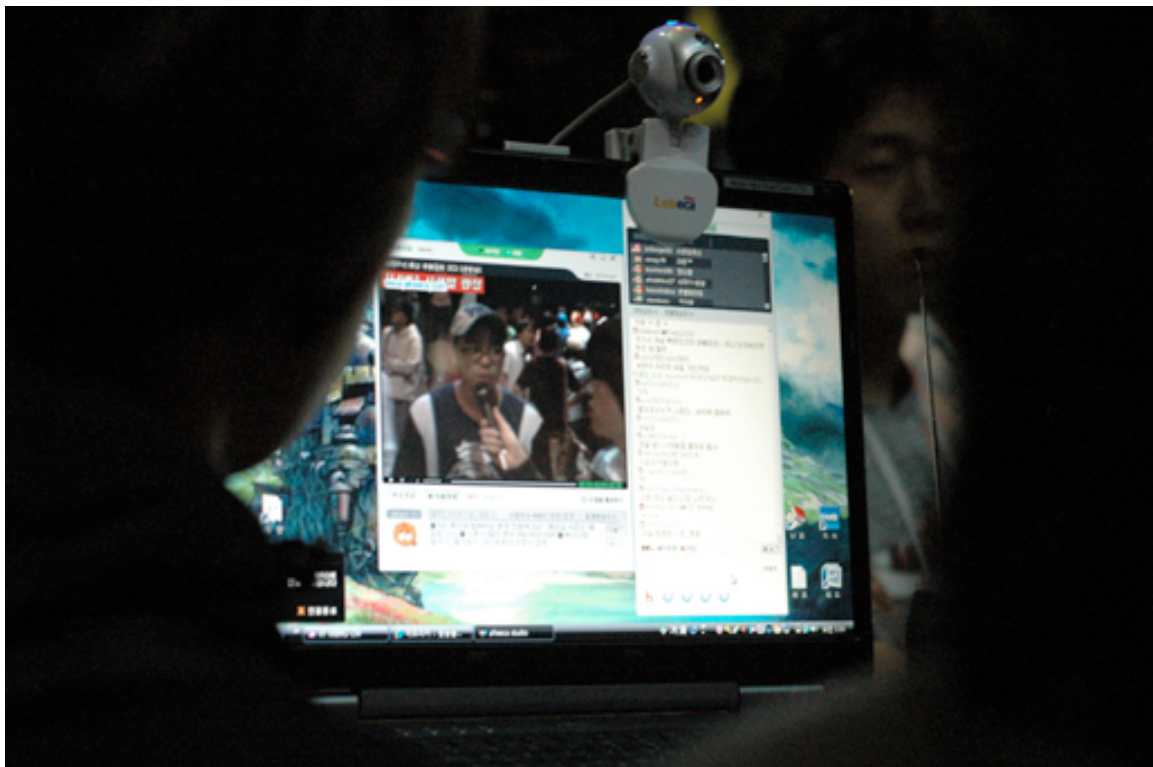


Figure 4. One-Person Reporters. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

Such on- and offline relationships went a further step: the Candlelight protesters brainstormed about democratic citizenship in their online discourse, while working on and enacting democratic civil society in their offline activities. If “netizen” means a person active in online communities, the Candlelighters interpreted the term in a more literal or active way (as citizens on the net or cybercitizens); yet they also expanded the definition by connecting the online communities with their vision of the national community. The Candlelighters identified themselves as a community in the act of civil discourse, and they saw hope for the democracy of Korea in that identification. We can see an expression of this hope in one netizen’s reflections on what it was like to communicate using Daum Agora (this individual’s net ID is *hyan’gi naneun maeul*—“village with fragrance”):

I, a middle-aged woman, have never participated in political protests ever before in my life. [But] I decided to go on the picnic of Daum Agora . . .

Azumma [the Korean term for a middle-aged woman; here, *Azumma* is the netizen *hyan’gi naneun maeul*] had a difficult time adjusting to the crowded and noisy place [Daum Agora], feeling knocked in a heap. . . . It is a plaza, literally an agora. In the open plaza [Daum Agora], from a distance I looked at the people, who constantly shared their ideas. When the news or postings are uploaded, they read them and voted for pros or cons. If postings received many pros, they would be selected as the best recommended opinions. Otherwise, postings would be buried by other people’s postings. Although it is not an agora exactly as it was in Greek city-states, the early democratic form is still intact in Daum Agora. If the majority vote is the most important principle of democracy, Daum Agora perfectly follows this idea In the process of sharing their ideas, [I learned that] the people are much wiser than I thought. Even several months ago, I used to let out my pent-up anger about the people’s ignorance and the limitations of representative democracy, but [from Daum Agora] I began to have a change of heart. Although some people call Daum Agora a dumping ground, I see hope for this country in Daum Agora.³⁷

As *hyan’gi naneun maeul*’s comment indicates, many of the Candlelighters who participated in Daum Agora defined their identities through the free interaction of ideas and opinions and the decision-making process, calling themselves Agorians. The Agorians projected their re-envisioning of the Republic of Korea through their

³⁷ *T’aehan minguk sangsik sacheon: Agora* [Dictionary for Common Sense in the Republic of Korea], ed. Agora pein (Seoul: Yōu wa durumi, 2008), 60-61.

online discourse. This vision was clearly manifested again in the Candlelight Vigil protest on June 10, 2008. In order to explore their new community, I will identify four moments during the course of the protesters' engagement with the Myung-bak Fortress on that day, forming a progression in the re-imagining of their new national community.

FIRST: ENCOUNTER WITH THE MYUNG-BAK FORTRESS

In commemoration of the June 10, 1987 Democratization Movement, the Candlelight protesters planned the One Million Candlelight March for June 10, 2008.³⁸ The Candlelight protesters anticipated June 10 with great excitement but also with some anxiety over whether their protests would be a major watershed. This protest was accompanied by memorials for the martyrs Lee Hanyeol and Lee Byungryel.³⁹ The death of Lee Hanyeol, who was killed by a police tear gas canister in June 1987, proved once more the state's brutality and undemocratic nature and provoked the nationwide democratization movement that ended Chun Du Hwan's military dictatorship. Twenty-one years later, Lee Byungryeol, a public transportation worker, immolated himself while protesting the importation of U.S. beef and the privatization of public service sectors, at the same time advocating the overthrow of Lee's administration. His death somberly illustrates how the Korean people's yearning for the democratization of society had not been fulfilled even twenty-one years after the death of Lee Hanyeol.

Because of the significance of June 10 in the history of democratization, the government was also preparing for the possibility of the biggest anti-government protest in twenty-one years—since the 1987 Democratization Movement—by building a two-story barricade of shipping containers in Gwanghwamun, Central Seoul, a few blocks away from the president's office. The police filled the containers with sand bags and coated them with industrial grease so that people would be unable to scale it. The protesters interpreted this barricade as a visual articulation or

³⁸ http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000924274 (last accessed June 2010).

³⁹ Ibid.



Figure 5. Myung-bak Fortress, June 10th, 2008. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

hypostatization of the president's will not to communicate with the people.⁴⁰ In response to government's use of shipping containers—ironically symbols of trade and communication—to figuratively block dialogue, the protesters re-appropriated the barricade as a stage for criticizing and mocking the government with humor and satire.

When netizens and bystanders found that the police were building the barricade, the Internet message boards were flooded with denunciations of the government:

In the 21st commemoration of the June 10th Democratization Movement, [the government] responded with a pro-government counterattack and the container blockage. . . . However, [the container wall] exposes the incapacity of the Lee government, and as the symbolic structure of the deaf government, it will be the worst monumental blemish remembered in history.

—khsyy698

⁴⁰ http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/292546.html (last accessed June 2010).

Because of the status of the hero Yi Sun-shin (the admiral who led several victories against the Japanese invasions in the sixteenth century), [the police] confused [the Gwanghwamun intersection] with wharfs, but even confusion should have some limits.

—dolsee62

The tourist attraction in the Gwanghwamun intersection makes [the site] perfect for a one night, two days' tour.

—mirine2s

Although [the police] worked hard to construct it, causing traffic jams since the morning . . . it would be so much fun if the citizens don't show up It's so ridiculous.

—kimmin3927⁴¹

The netizens also gave President Lee Myung-bak nicknames such as "Welding Myung-bak" and "Lego Myung-bak."⁴² Many were so "impressed" with their government's ability to build "the great monument" in such a short time that they joked that it should be registered as a UNESCO world cultural heritage site. They went on to list it as the "Myung-bak Fortress" in Wikipedia, defining it as emblematic of "Lee Myung-bak's style of communication."⁴³ The barricade wall, which was placarded with "2008 Seoul Landmark Myung-bak Fortress," was full of graffiti derived from leaflets: "Wailing Wall," "2MB," "Expert of Communication," and "This installation art stinks," with a dismissal notice for the president, his cabinet, pro-government mass media, and the new right wing.⁴⁴ The playful satire of the protesters was a tactic in their effort to counter the staid politics of the government, which many people viewed as either lacking imagination or stuck in a 1960s and '70s mentality in twenty-first century Korea. The consciousness gap between the government and the protesters might also be regarded as illustrating their alternative ideas about Korean democracy, and the urgency felt by the people in taking action to protect their emerging civil society.

⁴¹ http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=0000924360 (last accessed June 2010).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ <http://ko.wikipedia.org/wiki/명박산성> (last accessed June 2010).

⁴⁴ http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=0000924360 (last accessed June 2010).

SECOND STAGE: DEFINING THE BOUNDARY OF OUR NATION-STATE

The Candlelight protesters' attempts to re-envision the people's nation-state were manifested in their conceptualization of the barricade as the imagined territorial line between two nation-states: that of the people and that of the government of Lee Myung-bak. Their statement, "This is a new border of our country. From here starts the U.S. state of South Korea," implied that the barricade served as both a spatial and conceptual division between the two nation-states.⁴⁵ It also expressed the people's strong feelings of betrayal and alienation toward their own government, which had a more amicable relationship with its foreign allies than with its own citizens. For them, the government's exclusion of the protesters proved its illegitimacy as the representative of the Korean people and pushed the protesters to fashion their own nation-state.

In his essay "From Their Nation-State to All Our Nation-State," the philosopher Kim Sangbong argues that the Korean state authority has never considered the people as citizens of the nation but rather as its potential enemies.⁴⁶ That the first mass firing on protesters by the military during the Gwangju Uprising in 1980 started with the national anthem playing from speakers in the Gwangju city hall⁴⁷ suggests that the people have never fully belonged to the Korean nation-state.⁴⁸ The state's disregard for the people and the atrocities it committed ignited their unrelenting desire to realize their own nation-state in opposition to the existing one. The Candlelight participants' nationalism can be read in a similar vein, but it is very much shaped by Korea's globalization.

Here, if dissident nationalism was created by the dissident intellectuals' engagement with Korea's postcolonial condition, one must ask: after "the first year of globalization (*seggyehwa*)" was declared by Kim Young Sam's government in 1995, how might

⁴⁵ [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/12/world/asia/12seoul.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=candle light%20vigil%20protests%20seoul&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/12/world/asia/12seoul.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=candle%20light%20vigil%20protests%20seoul&st=cse); http://www.ohmynews.com/NWS_View/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000923096 (last accessed June 2010).

⁴⁶ Kim Sangbong, "Keudeu rui narae sei uri modu ui nara ro," in *5.18 keurigo yeoksa: keudeu rui narae seo uri modu ui nara ro* [May 18th and history: From their nation-state to all our nation-state] (Seoul: Kil, 2008), 322–73.

⁴⁷ I could not identify who turned on the national anthem at the site.

⁴⁸ <http://www.518.org/main.html?TM18MF=A030103> (last accessed June 2010).

nationalism adjust and further transform itself, given that a younger generation of Koreans had not grown up under the same nationalistic state rhetoric?⁴⁹ To distinguish the Candlelight participants' nationalism from the earlier state-sponsored or dissident nationalism, I will explore the forms of nationalism manifested in the IMF crisis and the 2002 Japan-Korea World Cup Game, not as starting points for a new nationalism but as the backdrop against which the Candlelighters articulated their fiercely-felt identification as Koreans.

As discussed earlier, the IMF crisis plunged Korean society into "IMF nationalism," which I define as the people's desire to recover their earlier economic achievements, because many people felt that Korea's economic sovereignty was now threatened and its national pride deeply wounded. The day the relief package was received was equated with the day Japan annexed Korea. In addition, like the 1907 National Debt Compensation Movement to gain economic independence from Japan, Koreans participated zealously in the pan-national movement for the revival of the national economy.⁵⁰ In this nationalistic atmosphere, which was continuous with that of the earlier nationalism, Jo-Han Hye-jung observed the reaction of teenagers:

What I found interesting was the reactions of teenagers. [The teenagers] who are eating pizza and hamburgers, enjoying Japanese comic books, and following foreign fashions actively participated in "the patriotic march." On the one hand, I was amazed at the power of media, which pushed them [in that direction]. On the other hand, I was surprised at the fact that the consumerist new generation, who did not seem to be interested in patriotism, participated so readily in the patriotic march. . . .

[I am sure that] you have seen the teenagers wearing backpacks with the Korean national flag. . . . Although it is true that coercion is at work in the

⁴⁹ Kang, *Hanguk hyondaesa sanchaek*. 1990-yondae pyon, no. 2, 146-151.

⁵⁰ The National Debt Repayment Movement in 1907 was a national movement aimed at repaying the Korean empire's debt, which was thirteen million won, through individual donations. Begun in Taegu by Seo Sangdon, Kim Kwangjae, Park Haeryeong, and others in February 1907, the movement spread nationwide. Many newspapers such as *Taehan Maeil Sinbo*, *Hwangsŏng Sinmun*, *Jaeguk Sinmun*, and *Mansebo* actively participated in collecting funds. To repay the debt, many people gave up smoking, and women participated by selling their accessories and creating several fund recruitment centers through women's organizations. Even in Japan, many Korean students studying abroad collected individual donations. By the end of May, the Korean people had collected more than 203,000 won. Nevertheless, the Japanese colonial government viewed this effort as an expression of Korean nationalism and tried to impede and stifle the movement. Finally, the colonial government falsely charged the assistant administrator of the National Debt Repayment Assembly for misappropriation of funds. Because of this incident, the National Debt Repayment Movement failed.

case, for instance, of having elementary school students bring proof of participation in the gathering-gold movement, or a school principal's "recommending" that flags be attached to backpacks, and so forth, it is very obvious that the consumerist atmosphere is being changed to a nationalistic atmosphere. To be precise, [they] could [now] consume things that contain nationalistic content."⁵¹

Jo-han suggests that the teenagers' consumerist attitudes allowed them to buy into nationalism eagerly, and to appropriate the national flag like it was any other brand. Although such an interpretation is plausible, the questions remain: what is nationalism's appeal to Korean teenagers? And does their participation in patriotic rituals in fact indicate some change in Korean nationalism? Before I answer these questions, I want to explore the 2002 Japan-Korea World Cup tournament as a means of explaining changes in the people's attitudes toward the Korean nation-state.

During the World Cup tournament in 2002, hundreds of thousands of Koreans, old and young, men and women, spilled into the street, wearing red and creatively wearing or displaying the national flag and the Taegeuk symbol. The national flag, which people once rejected as a symbolic instrument of the state's control and state nationalism, had become fashionable. The city hall in Seoul, the symbolic site of the democratization movement during the 1980s, was filled with Red Devils (supporters of the Korean team) celebrating the World Cup. As the *New York Times* reported: "On the vast city hall plaza where a half-million demonstrators shouted protests against dictatorial rule a generation ago, about 200,000 red-shirted young people roared a new set of slogans this rainy afternoon with an equally nationalistic message" (June 11, 2002).⁵² The national flag and national anthem became the central signifiers for unifying the Korean people—rooting for the home team's victory—and for stirring up national pride. This is evident in the Red Devils' cheering at the soccer field:

Right after the Japanese team had a big match in Saitama soccer field, Busan Asiad Stadium, which was holding the Korea versus Poland game, presented a magnificent spectacle of red-colored waves. While playing the national anthem, massive-sized national flags were moving in a grand

⁵¹ Jo-han Hye-jung, "Teukpyeol taedam: asia jisigin neteuwokeureul mandeulja" [Special talk: making the Asian intellectuals' network], in *Hyeondae sasang* (Fall 1998), 17–18.

⁵² Quoted in Gi-wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 1.

swell over the red-colored waves, making the stadium at once a battlefield. Over fifty thousands spectators were all shouting "Taehan min'guk" (the Republic of Korea), in red-colored shirts with the national flag in their hands. After the victory over Poland and the following games with the United States and Portugal, etc., the Red Devils colored soccer stadiums and the street with red and national flags, making it impossible to distinguish between the Red Devils and non-Red Devils. Whenever the national anthems were played, the Red Devils spread giant flags, overwhelming the opposing team even before the game began.⁵³

While at least ten million Red Devils were cheering for the home team, Koreans in the United States, France, Germany, the Netherlands (the birthplace of the Korean soccer team's head coach), and other countries joined as well. The sociologist Gi-wook Shin believes that the Korean people's fervor was not only about winning but also a matter of "national pride, identity, and confidence."⁵⁴ Indeed, when Korea defeated Spain, President Kim Dae Jung declared it "Korea's happiest day since Tan'gun (the founding father of the Korean nation in 2333 B.C.)." Shin perceived that Kim interpolated Korea's soccer victory into the nation's historical narrative, thereby suggesting that Korean nationalism was deeply engrained in "a common bloodline" and "shared ancestry."⁵⁵

However, while Shin identified the core of the Red Devils in ethnic nationalism, other commentators characterized the phenomenon of the Red Devils across a diverse spectrum of descriptions, such as "the collective hysterical symptom forgetting reality," "standardized, totalitarian attitudes which remind one of the Nazi party convention in the era of Nuremberg," "the logic of commodity form seized by colossal capital," "a sample of national pride freed from 'red complex [communism]," and "the victory of citizenship which observed order and cleanliness without disorders."⁵⁶ Diverging from these opinions, the cultural critic Lee Dong-yeon emphasizes that the multiplicities of the Red Devils and their various desires coexisted in that national space.⁵⁷

Among these commentators' diverse perspectives, I want to focus on a few interesting points: the young people's voluntary

⁵³ Yi Dongyeon, "Bulgeun angmawa chuch'ehyeongseong: naesyeoneollijeumin'ga seutairui chwihiyang'in'ga," [The Red Devils and formation of sovereignty: nationalism or style and taste], *Munhwa kwahak* 31 (2002): 169.

⁵⁴ Gi-wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*, 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁶ Yi Dongyeon, "Bulgeun angmawa chuch'ehyeongseong: naesyeoneollijeumin'ga seutairui chwihiyang'in'ga," 165.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

participation in a nationalistic event; their desire to represent themselves collectively through various forms of performance or by appropriating state nationalism's symbols for their own purposes; the Red Devils' strong awareness of what they represented to the global audience; and Korean nationalism, as it embraced the people's multiple and individual aspirations in fluid form. In addition, the Red Devils' massive cheering at city hall and their pride as citizens of the Republic of Korea indicate that it is difficult to discuss current Korean nationalism within the frame of earlier forms of nationalism. Korean nationalism, as a malleable form of imagining the Korean nation-state, was in 2008 more inclined toward re-envisioning the people's national community in the ideal of democracy by reworking many of the features already manifested by IMF nationalism and the 2002 Japan-Korea World Cup.

How, then, did the Candlelight protesters re-imagine their nation-state according to democratic principles, as promised in the Constitution? First, they manipulated the dissident discourse contesting the Republic of Korea's legitimacy to in turn question the legitimacy of the Lee government specifically and to drive a wedge between the people and the government. At the same time, they carefully controlled their political discourse so as not to be subsumed by existing leftist politics. Second, the Candlelighters articulated their vision of the Korean nation-state as a democratic civil society through the rhetoric of the everyday practice of democracy, as well as through multiple performances.

2.1. QUESTIONING THE LEGITIMACY OF THE LEE GOVERNMENT

In order to question the Lee government's legitimacy, the Candlelight participants revived the earlier dissident rhetoric of legitimacy involved in the foundation of the Republic of Korea and its perceived sympathy with authoritarian governments. The Koreans have long questioned the failure to eradicate pro-Japanese collaborators when the Republic of Korea was founded; many people believe that these "traitors" continued to prioritize their and their allies' interests over those of the Korean people at large, distorting the fate of the Korean nation. Likewise, the protesters perceived the Lee government's pro-

United States attitudes to be similar to the pro-Japanese collaborators' betrayal of Koreans during the colonial era (1910-1945).

The protesters' crude logic was in fact a powerful discourse of identification for the members of the Korean national community as such, while excluding the government and its history of pro-Japanese collaborations or relations with dictatorships. Many people strongly believed that the government and ruling party's half-hearted engagement in the colonial past (i.e., a few ruling party members' participation in the fiftieth anniversary of Japan's Self Defense Forces in 2004) and its hard-line North Korea policy resulted from the fact that some members of the government and the establishment were descendants of the pro-Japanese collaborators or colonial sympathizers.

Nonetheless, some commentators viewed with concern the protesters' "othering" of President Lee and the government as xenophobic nationalism, especially because the protesters had stressed the president's birthplace: Osaka, Japan. By focusing on this in their critiques against President Lee, these commentators suggested, the Candlelight participants marked the president as Japanese in order to control the national boundary or to take advantage of the Koreans' general hostility against the Japanese. However, their pun, which involved changing the name of the ruling party Hannara-dang (The Grand National Party) to Ttannara-dang (or, literally, "party for another country"), suggests that, for the protesters, "Japanese" should not be understood as Japanese citizens per se but as Koreans serving others and selling out their nation. Hence, if one views the othering of the president simply in terms of anti-Japanese sentiments or ethnic nationalism, one misses the Candlelight participants' maneuvering of dissident nationalism for an alternative agenda.

They viewed their efforts toward a democratic civil society as part of a historical continuum tracing the Korean people's unaccomplished project of self-determination after liberation. In addition, they determined the national boundary themselves based on their views of Korea's democracy: just as the Korean government treated those whom they deemed to be illegitimate with brutality in the name of anti-communism, so the participants in turn disqualified the government from their nation-state because its vision of a democratic Korean society was irreconcilable with theirs.

2.2. NEW POLITICS IN BOUNDARY-MAKING

If the Candlelight protesters excluded the current government and the establishment from their national community, they also made use of self-censoring and exclusionary mechanisms for controlling the internal boundaries of the process of re-imagining their community, just as similar communities have done elsewhere. In my discussion of the internal boundaries within the anti-government forces, I concentrate mainly on the issue of the Candlelight protesters' failure to represent the concerns of the underprivileged as well as on their discourse of purity. Here, the "rhetoric of purity" can be defined as the protesters' desire to frame their activism as an ideal practice of democratic citizenship that makes no concessions to conventional politics.⁵⁸ Although the Candlelighters controlled their boundaries as a way of creating a new politics, doing so unintentionally resulted in ignoring the interests of the people who most needed their attention and in diminishing the Candlelighters' radical potential for social evolution.

LOSING THE VOICES OF THE UNDERPRIVILEGED

Many people noted that "newness" and political radicalism were articulated when the Candlelight girls brought their voices together. Junior high and high school girls have no formal way to intervene in the political decision-making process, so their lives have been very much determined by adults' votes or the government's decisions. For instance, the students are at school from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., including regular class time and the preparatory after-school academy. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education has often changed the format of the university entrance exam without giving much thought to the long-term consequences, causing great confusion among students, teachers, and parents.⁵⁹ In these circumstances, the students have no

⁵⁸ Yi sanggil, "Sunsuseong ui moral: chotpul siwie natanan oyeome gwanhan tansang," in *Kuedaenun we chopureul kkeusyeonnayo* [Why Did You Extinguish Your Candles?], ed. Dangdae pip'yong (Seoul: Sanchaekja, 2009), 110.

⁵⁹ For instance, if the Education Ministry suddenly changed the weighting of the components of school records that it deemed most important in its evaluations with respect to college entrance exam requirements, students needed to re-focus their studies in order to be competitive.

say but are expected to modify their study plans accordingly. Also, in the job market, teenagers as well as those in their twenties are exposed to serious exploitation, but there was no discussion of, or consensus on, the problem of teenage labor, not to mention any guarantee of a living wage.

In the Candlelight cultural festivals, these teenagers, who had not been heard, voiced their concerns—concerns shared deeply by many Koreans—with acerbic wit. The teens' emergence indicated that their subaltern position had the potential to connect the diverse issues of other underprivileged groups (e.g., temporary workers and migrant workers) through their shared, unacknowledged rights as citizens. However, as many observers complained, instead of listening to these grievances, the parent generation of the Candlelight Girls took over the students' activism and changed it into a middle-class (consumers') movement with its own issues, which caused many disadvantaged people to feel alienated and ignored.

A labor union committee member from the company E-Land commented on the Candlelight protesters' indifference to the predicaments of temporary workers, comprising 8.5 million Koreans:

When I first saw the Candlelight protesters, it was literally hope itself and so beautiful. Four hundred days had already passed since our strikes started. . . . The union members who have been suffering gave a shout for joy and appeared to momentarily find hope. Seeing the great spirit of the Candlelight Vigil protests as if it overthrew the Lee administration, we had high expectations that the protests would help to resolve our troubles. . . . If these citizens were interested in the issues of precarious and temporary workers a bit, we might be able to break away from this stifling situation. . . . Someday, I wish we can all be Candlelight citizens. . . . I wish the Candlelighters would march toward us. The Candlelighters had not come to us after all. The precarious workers whom I met in the protests, which I attended ten or more times, were outcasts. . . . The people who are so passionate about mad cow disease, which will break out in ten years, are indifferent to the problems of precarious and temporary workers whose right to live is taken away.⁶⁰

Based on this account, it is likely that many temporary workers did not feel part of the Candlelight protesters' new community, no matter how much they wanted to be. Much of the protesters' agenda was so

⁶⁰ Yi Namshin, "Areumdaun chotp'uri homebeo maechang'ero oji aeun kkadalgeun: picheong' kyujik tujaeng saeopjang nodongjaga bon chotpul" [The Reason Why the Beautiful Candlelighters Did Not Come to Homever: The Candlelighters from the Perspective of the Precarious Workers in the Strike Site of Homever], in *Naei reul yeoneun yeoksa* 33 (Fall 2008), 145–47.

closely related to middle-class issues that these workers had little reason to care.⁶¹

However, this does not mean that the Candlelight protesters intended to exclude other underprivileged Koreans in the protests; many groups of citizens freely joined the protests by merging their issues with those of the protesters, as in the case of the Freight Carrier Solidarity. It is not my intention to argue that the exclusion of temporary workers was owing to their incapacity to incorporate their issues in the general agenda of the Candlelight Vigil protests. I refuse to perceive the Candlelight protesters' innate conservatism as stemming simply from the middle-class status of many of its participants; instead, I contend that the perceived exclusivity might have resulted from the fact that the Candlelight participants were not successful in conceptualizing neoliberal problems at the level of socioeconomic structure, or from their hesitation to do so because such an attempt could be easily seen as the expression of an ideological inclination toward the left, relegating the protesters' efforts to the binarism or partisanship of conventional politics.

In addition, the Candlelight protesters' conceptualization of the neoliberal problem in terms of everyday issues is very much circumscribed by the nature of the online network that the protesters actively mobilized for their activism. The online network connects diverse issues in a horizontal and endlessly open manner instead of linearly and hierarchically. The difference between the horizontal and linear ways of linking various issues might be translated into dissimilarity between the Candlelight protesters and the earlier dissidents in their approaches to South Korea's socioeconomic problems.

While the dissidents attempted to understand the Korean people's predicament at the structural level, in the information age the protesters connect their issues through the online network. The Candlelighters' careful positioning (bringing the neoliberal problem home in the form of everyday issues), as well as their networking, helped to create a fluid dialogical space between various groups of citizens and introduced a new way of working on varied yet intertwined issues, embracing the painful realities of other citizens as their own. Nevertheless, by addressing their deteriorating lives as everyday issues rather than as a fundamental structural problem, the Candlelight protesters could not effectively intervene in the current

⁶¹ Ibid.

socioeconomic system and failed to represent the needs of those who were suffering most from economic insecurity.

"THE RHETORIC OF PURITY"

At the heart of the Candlelight protesters' insistence on looking at neoliberal problems as everyday issues was their strong desire to envision their politics as distinct from existing state and progressive politics. In the development of the Candlelight Vigil protests, many people pinned their hopes on the emergence of a new democracy through discussions on Daum Agora, through the people's voluntary participation in politics, and through the political discourses that directly touched on people's everyday lives. Hence, by aligning the Candlelight participants' national community with the image of ideal communities, they wanted their activism and community to be conceived as the vanguard of a new social experiment. They refused to fall in line with conventional politics, a system of which they were suspicious and which they detested.

The Korean scholar Yi Sanggil explains the protesters' desire to create new political ideals and subjectivities through the concept of "the morals of purity." He argues that the morals of purity operated at multiple levels in imagining and realizing the Candlelighters' community, as well as in their interaction with the dominant discourses.⁶² Nevertheless, I will limit my discussion of the Candlelight participants' refusal to be "political" in relation to the rhetoric of purity and its limitations.

Yi Sanggil approaches this ambiguous concept, the rhetoric of purity, by looking at the icon of the Candlelight Vigil protests: the Candlelight Girl. The Candlelight Girl is a representation of a cute young girl in a school uniform, presumably a junior high school student, who initiated the Candlelight cultural festivals. The Candlelight Girl's stylized body, innocent yet determined facial expression, rosy cheeks, and the large candle she holds all help to evoke feelings of innocence and youth that made adults feel protective.⁶³ The Candlelight Girl was popular among various groups of Candlelight protesters, and its image was widely circulated on stickers, leaflets, posters, T-shirts, and so forth. Along with the

⁶² Yi, "Sunsuseong ui moral," 96.

⁶³ Ibid., 102.

Candlelight Girl's image of purity, the junior high and high school girls' active participation in the Candlelight cultural festivals helped people to conceptualize a new democracy in everyday civil discourse: the "adults" were learning a new way of engaging in politics while they were listening to other people's diverse issues with laughter, applause, and sympathy.

Although Yi Sanggil's reading of the Candlelight Girl is convincing, I wonder if it brings the movement back to the grown-ups' bosom and too easily equates the students' self-representative activism with their image of "purity" and "innocence." Instead, I argue that the Candlelight Girl should be understood more in terms of "playfulness" and "mischievousness," distinctive qualities of children as well as of the Candlelight participants' engagement in current politics. Thus, I propose that the ideas of "purity" and "innocence" should be examined in the context of the Candlelighters' playful activism and their self-representative democracy.

It is precisely the protesters' "playfulness," as manifested in their civil discourse, that enabled the people to conceive of its political engagement as "pure," in diametrical opposition to the



Figure 6. The Candlelight Girl. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

existing political system as something “impure” or “contaminated.” “political” and “ideological,” relating these terms to conventional politics. They envisioned their activism as standing outside the existing political ideology and structure. The conceptualization of their activism as pure, however, influenced and limited their tactics and the subjects of their debates. For instance, many protesters strongly opposed the use of violence, distinguishing themselves from earlier protesters. Moreover, by rejecting active collaborations with existing political factions, the Candlelight protesters significantly decreased the potential for change within the larger political landscape in South Korea. As Yi Sanggil cautiously muses, this is why the protesters might not be able to do more than share the fundamental principles of democracy, as suggested by the fact that the song “The Constitution Article One” was most often sung in the protests.⁶⁴

In addition, the Candlelight participants’ discursive logic of “pure” and “impure” or “contaminated” could be hijacked by the government and conservative news media all too easily and rhetorically altered to control the Candlelight protests.⁶⁵ The pro-government mass media deployed the rhetoric of “purity” and “contamination” as the criterion for distinguishing “good” protests from “bad” ones. For instance, a May 27, 2008 editorial in the *Han’guk Daily* newspaper showed great concern that the Candlelight Vigil protests arose from the people’s voluntary expressions against government policies but were spoiled by labor unions and civic groups and became just like the general anti-government political struggles of the 1980s. The conservative newspaper *Chosun* framed the citizens’ protests against mad cow as a “pure-hearted” reaction, while their overall opposition to the government’s policies was “impure” and “contaminated.”⁶⁶ By viewing the labor unions and civic groups as corrupt forces going along for a free ride, the news media attempted to deny the Candlelighters’ radical potential. Nevertheless, the protesters’ vision of their activism as “pure” could result in sustaining, however unintentionally, the logic of the state authority’s suppression as an act of separating contaminants from the rest of the population.⁶⁷ It is ironic to see that the protesters’ attempt to place their politics outside the framework of existing politics in fact

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 98.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Yi, “Sunsuseong ui moral,” 100.

became a good excuse for the government's usual oppression of dissident movements.

THIRD: THE BARRICADE AS THE PLAYGROUND OF THE CANDLELIGHTERS

The intersection of Gwanghwamun, where the barricade stood, was transformed into the Candlelight protesters' "playground," or a liberated area in the spirit of the community formed by the Gwangju people during the May 18 Gwangju Uprising. The Candlelight participants, who had organized street protests from the direction of Seodaemun, the Seodaemun police agency office, Angukdong, and so forth, flocked to the Gwanghwamun area. In every quarter, people were participating in diverse cultural activities, such as *pungmul* performance (traditional Korean percussion music accompanied by dance) and small-scale musical performances. Also, there were impromptu forums to discuss future Candlelight activism. The Candlelight protesters consisted of various groups: college students, junior high and high school students, labor union workers and farmers, fathers and daughters, babies and mothers, nuns and monks, and artists and performers.

Although the June 10 Candlelight Vigil protests took place simultaneously in several major cities of South Korea, the focal point of the Candlelight Vigil protests during the three month-long period was Seoul, South Korea's foremost economic, political, and cultural center. As much as the lengthy duration of the protests was a major factor in the limited geographical diversity of its participants, it also reflects the aforementioned middle-class status of the Candlelighters.

One middle-aged man took a picture of the Candlelight Tower in front of the *DongA Daily News* Building, saying that he was waiting for his daughter, who would arrive after work. He commented: "[The Candlelight Vigil protests] remind me of anti-Yusin protests in my school years [1972–1979]." ⁶⁸ Another citizen commented: "It is like a night market. As Lee Myung-bak became president, 'Lee Myung-bak cultural festivals' were created." ⁶⁹ Also, a woman who worked in the

⁶⁸ http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/292459.html (last accessed June 2010).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

area said: "Although President Lee couldn't communicate with the citizens, [he] helps the citizens to communicate with each other beyond generational differences."⁷⁰ This diverse body of people articulated a sense of everyday life by re-creating their daily interactions with ordinary people in a public space. Likewise, the mingling of the various generations and their memories among the protesters revived the people's struggle for their nation-state. This diverse representation helped them to conceptualize their long debate as an exercise in democratic citizenship.

After midnight, through impromptu free debates, the Candlelight protesters decided to build a "citizens' fortress" out of Styrofoam in front of the container barricade to use as a "free-speech platform." At the Citizens' Fortress, unlike at the Myung-bak fortress, the protesters could openly express their thoughts in the form of free speech and debates. They heatedly debated for several hours whether they should climb over the container barricade. Among those who supported such a crossing was Pyun Seunghun, who argued that the protesters should do it to show their conviction: "Today, the biggest crowd gathers. We should at least pass over the line that the state created! That's our voice. The government's building of the container is itself violence. All actions which confront [the barricade] should not be viewed as violence. [I am not suggesting that] we should lift iron pipes."⁷¹ Park Seungsu and others opposed this idea: "There is not much change if we climb up the barricade wall, but if the protests become violent, it will provoke the government, and the *Chosun*, *JoongAng*, and *DongA Daily* newspapers will 'chew' (attack) us wholeheartedly. . . . We will lose the citizens' broad support. Peaceful protests are our weapons."⁷²

These conflicting positions were not resolved, so for a time the citizens tried to decide by clapping. Several participants who were trying to assert their opinions were even shouting and pushing, which concerned others. In the end, several people, mostly students, climbed to the top of the barricade and shook their banners as a symbolic gesture against the government.⁷³ Although they could not

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/292549.html; http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/292545.html (both last accessed June 2010).



Figure 7. Gathering of Family and Friends. Photograph by Kim Yunki.



Figure 8. The Citizen's Fortress. Photograph by Kim Yunki.

reach any concrete consensus, many citizens were satisfied with the peaceful end because they had shared their opinions on the protests and had been able to influence its direction through a democratic process.⁷⁴ This discussion was not only about the citizens' collective contemplation of the future of the Candlelight Vigil protests; it was also about the democratic process of decision making. Thus, they perceived their performances as an alternative to or necessary interventions into current Korean politics.

FOURTH: KOREAN NATIONALISM AS A DIALOGICAL POINT

How, then, was the Candlelight participants' struggle to create a new national community received by the global audience? On June 10, I encountered an American man picking up pamphlets and other papers with his trash clamps, close to the barricade. Many citizens found it interesting to see a foreigner cleaning up the site, so I asked him in English what he was doing there. He said that he was practicing "love," the teaching of Tan'gun (the founding father of the Korean nation in the founding mythology), which he had learned from four years of living in South Korea. He was carrying a backpack with miniature South Korean and American flags, as if his humble act reflected his desire for resuming an amicable relationship between the two countries. After a few friendly exchanges of questions and answers with people around him, he suddenly pointed at a child next to me and began to yell at the protesters, asking why the Korean people were teaching this little child hatred and violence. He made a long, aggressive speech about the anti-Americanism of the Candlelighters without giving bystanders any chance to express their opinions. They were at first stunned by his shouting, but soon many people surrounded him in a circle, saying, "It is not about anti-Americanism!"

This brief encounter revealed the tension between the appearance of Korean nationalism and its reality and aspirations in the global era.⁷⁵ In South Korea, only in part because of its long

⁷⁴ http://www.ohmynews.com/nws_web/view/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000926055 (last accessed June 2010).

⁷⁵ The historian Jacqueline Pak uses the idea of appearance vs. reality to discuss the prominent nationalist leader Ahn Changho's independence movement under the colonial reality (1910–1945). Pak, "An Ch'angho and the Nationalist Origins of Korean Democracy," Ph.D. dissertation (University of London, 1999), 267.

history of state oppression, as Song Tuyul and others have noted, the national division into South and North Korea and the complex international politics surrounding the Peninsula made it impossible to easily abandon nationalism even in the global era.⁷⁶ Furthermore, the country's division has created an unusual space in which nationalism and globalism are both competing with and reinforcing each other. Hence, in the globalized world, it is crucial to reinterpret and rework Korean nationalism as a creative process of examining one's existence and intervening in the disjunctions between democracy and the market. The protesters reinvigorated their national community's enthusiasm to fight against the neoliberal restructuring of their life. However, they cautiously re-imagined it in a democratic civil society that not only embraced the Koreans' aspirations to create a just society, but which also opened itself to the possibility of global collaborations that seek to transform the fundamental condition of the economy. These goals were not explicitly articulated in the protests. However, the Candlelight protesters showed that they were interested in creating a dialogue with others and in seeking international support for their causes.

The Candlelight protesters followed news coverage of their protests in the foreign press and shared it with other netizens to demonstrate their legitimacy against the government and the pro-government mass media.⁷⁷ In addition, the coverage was used to reveal and counterattack the government and the conservative mass media's falsification of foreign news coverage. Some Candlelight protesters participated in discussion boards to explain to foreign netizens the current situation in Korea or to correct distorted information.⁷⁸ However, these discussions were contested and despised by many U.S. netizens who perceived them as demonstrations of anti-globalism and anti-Americanism by hyper-nationalistic Koreans. Like the American man who demonstrated

⁷⁶ Song TuYul, *Minjok eun sarajiji annueunda: chaedok ch'eorhakcha* Song TuYul ui tongil sidae sesang ilki (Seoul: Hankyŏrae sinmunsa, 2000). Song Tuyul was charged under the National Security Law with being a spy for North Korea for taking several trips to North Korea. Hwang Jangyeop, a former major politician and defector of North Korea, asserted that Song was a member of North Korea's Workers' Party of Korea.

⁷⁷ <http://bbs1.agora.media.daum.net/gaia/do/debate/read?bbsId=D101&articleId=1675958>; <http://bbs1.agora.media.daum.net/gaia/do/debate/read?bbsId=D003&articleId=850128>; <http://bbs1.agora.media.daum.net/gaia/do/debate/read?bbsId=D003&articleId=844242> (last accessed June 2010).

⁷⁸ http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2008/06/south_korean_protests_over_us.html#comment; <http://www.newsweek.com/id/157506> (both last accessed June 2010). I saw some Candlelighters' interventions at the discussion board on www.washingtonpost.com as well, but I could not retrieve it.

hostility in front of the barricade wall, they perceived Koreans as "very simple-minded and short-sighted," commenting that they "had no lives and nothing better to do. . . . I wish they would fight for causes that are just and based on fact and science," and that "they hate America while they use us . . . BOYCOTT KOREAN GOODS!"⁷⁹

In fact, these charges frame the anti-Candlelight protests within the earlier conflicts between nation-states. Those leveling the charges failed to see the United States as a global hegemonic power and so could not recognize the Candlelighters' Korean nationalism as an intervention into multiple complications created by the contentious relationship between nationalism and transnationalism. In spite of the protesters' eagerness to communicate with the international public, it would be too optimistic to say that they intended to expand their protests into an international people's movement. However, the Candlelight participants did demonstrate the potential for transforming nationalism into a point of convergence for transnational collaborations to re-envision the globalized world and to work for a common political agenda in a collective manner.

CONCLUSION

The Candlelight protesters engaged in a collective re-envisioning of the Korean national community to create a democratic civil society and to intervene in the debilitating process of neo-liberalism. To re-imagine their nation-state, the protesters mobilized their form of nationalism by selectively engaging with earlier forms of dissident nationalism, while opening up new possibilities for international collaborations and overcoming some of the limitations of dissident nationalism. However, we can also see that the Candlelighters ran up against certain limits: a lack of attention to the representation of the underprivileged, their failure to form a new political subjectivity, a new political figure that could act on and transform twenty-first-century Korea's socioeconomic system; the Candlelighters' appropriation of the Constitution as justification for their activism and their lack of political alternatives;⁸⁰ and the separation between

⁷⁹ http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/2008/06/south_korean_protests_over_us.html#comment; <http://www.newsweek.com/id/157506> (both last accessed June 2010).

⁸⁰ Yu Yeongju, "Chotpul minjuchuu chachihal taeani inneunga" [The Candlelighters' Democracy: Are There Alternatives?], in *Kuedaenun we chopureul kkeusyeonnayo* [Why Did You Extinguish Your Candle?], ed. Tangdae pip'yeong (Seoul: Sanchaekja, 2009), 84.

the progressives and the citizens, as well as that between the representative political system and street politics. Following the Candlelight Vigil protests, some were skeptical of the extent to which the movement had advanced the democratization of society, particularly because of the tightened government control that followed, including the pressing of charges against some “violent” Candlelight protesters and the revised media legislation that followed. Despite these challenges, the Candlelight Vigil protests demonstrated great potential to radically rethink and reformulate nationalism as a new people’s collectivism in the globalized world.